

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



VACCINATIONS AND WORMING



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

VACCINATIONS – ESSENTIAL PROTECTION

A vaccination is an injection that stimulates an immune response against a specific disease to give your horse maximum protection against that disease. It usually involves a course of three injections, followed by annual boosters.



What conditions can be vaccinated against?

The two vaccinations that every horse should receive are influenza and tetanus. If you wish to show, race or enter your horse in competitions it must be vaccinated against influenza.

Tetanus ('lock jaw')

Tetanus is caused by a bacterium, *Clostridium tetani*, which is found in soil and enters the horse's bloodstream via an open wound. Even small wounds can allow contamination and, because the incubation period is seven to 21 days, the wound has usually healed by the time the first signs of the disease are apparent.

Signs of tetanus

- Vague stiffness in the head and limbs, progressing to reluctance to move
- Spasms in the muscles of the head and neck resulting in difficulty chewing, nostril flaring and a wide-eyed expression
- Trembling progressing to violent, whole body spasms in response to sudden movements or noise

Approximately 90 per cent of unvaccinated horses that develop tetanus die. The small number of horses that do recover usually require intensive veterinary treatment and nursing for up to six weeks.

Equine influenza (flu)

This is a highly contagious, viral disease of the respiratory system caused by different strains of influenza virus. A horse contracts the virus through contact with an infected horse or indirectly through contaminated environments. Infected horses incubate the disease for one to three days before displaying symptoms, which is why outbreaks of equine influenza spread so rapidly.

Symptoms of influenza

- A rise in temperature up to 41°C (106°F) for one to three days, often undetected
- A harsh, dry cough of sudden onset that persists for two to three weeks or more
- Clear nasal discharge progressing to thick, green-yellow discharge
- Lethargy and loss of appetite

The disease can develop into life-threatening bronchitis or pneumonia. When horses recover from influenza, they can be left in a debilitated state making them more susceptible to secondary infections.

Outbreaks of influenza are most common when large numbers of young horses are brought together in stressful conditions such as those found at sales or shows.

Is vaccination dangerous?

No. Millions of horses have been vaccinated against tetanus and influenza over many years and the number of adverse reactions reported from these vaccines is insignificant, usually involving only local injection site reactions or mild muscle stiffness.

Can I still ride my horse?

You should try and reduce stress such as heavy exercise for 24 to 48 hours after vaccination.

Vaccination schedules

Your vet will advise on the most appropriate vaccination schedule for your horse.

WORMS – THE HIDDEN ENEMY

Worms are parasites, living inside your horse and taking nourishment from it. The four most common types are strongyles, ascarids, tapeworms and bots.

How do I know if my horse has worms?

Even a horse that appears to be in good health may have worms causing internal damage. In young and older horses infestation can result in:

- loss of condition, or ill thrift, typically seen as a 'ribby horse'
- lethargy
- weight loss
- diarrhoea
- colic
- loss of appetite
- dull, rough coat

If you suspect your horse has worms, your vet needs to confirm the diagnosis and identify the type of worms using a faecal egg count or blood test.

How does my horse get worms?

Your horse will get worms if it is turned out with horses or donkeys that have worms, because the pasture will be contaminated with eggs and larvae. Pastures can remain contaminated for a considerable time, so even if your horse is turned out alone it could get worms.

What can I do about worms?

Pasture management

The aim of this is to break the cycle of infection by removing the eggs and larvae from the pasture.

Removal of faeces

The most effective method is to remove and dispose of faeces from the pasture every day. Mowing and harrowing the pasture helps to reduce larvae numbers by breaking up faeces and exposing the larvae to the elements and to predators.

Pasture rotation

Pasture rotation can also be an effective way of reducing the number of larvae on the grass. The pasture should be rested for at least six months to successfully reduce the numbers of larvae. Allowing other livestock such as sheep, cattle or goats to graze on the pasture can help to break the lifecycles of the equine worms.

It is essential to worm all horses with the same wormer 48 hours before they are moved on to fresh, rested paddocks, to prevent them contaminating it. Other steps in pasture management include:

- keeping the number of horses per acre to a minimum
- grazing with other species, such as sheep. Worms are species specific.
- turning out horses of similar age together to reduce exposure to certain parasites and to increase the effectiveness of your worming programme
- supplying hay or grain in a rack rather than feeding from the ground
- regular grooming – if you spot bot eggs remove them completely

Wormers

Dosing your horse with wormers removes adult worms in the intestine (some wormers also attack migrating larvae) and the risk of re-infection is reduced because the number of infective larvae in the faeces is reduced.

How do I know what to buy?

Worming treatments can become ineffective over a period of time because the parasites build up resistance to them. It is important to rotate the worming treatments you use, changing both the brand and its 'active ingredient'. No single wormer is effective against all parasites. Your vet is the best person to draw up the most effective worming schedule tailored for your horse. The dosing frequency of worming treatments varies according to the age of your horse, its management, climatic conditions and the product used, but you should expect to worm your horse every six to 12 weeks.

Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.

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