

Winter reminders

Vaccinations, Deworming, Fescue, etc.

As this is being written, it is midwinter and everyone is looking forward to spring. With spring comes the foaling, breeding, and show seasons, as well as the trial riders who cannot wait to break out of winter quarters and start riding. In preparation for this activity, it is important our horses be current on their vaccinations and deworming. The brood mares must also be prepared and ready for breeding season.

The recommendations for vaccinations vary with the activities of the horse. The gelding who is used on weekends to give the grandkids a ride will have different requirements than the horse who travels to an event once or twice each week. The colt who is just being started on his vaccinations must receive a minimum number to build his immunity. This immunity will then be maintained with boosters. It is this schedule we will discuss today.

The foals of last year are six months or older and should be well on their ways to completing their vaccinations. For all the vaccinations except rabies, it takes two or three doses, administered at three to four week intervals, to establish the immunity necessary to protect against exposure. We recommend the foals be vaccinated for:

- tetanus,
- sleeping sickness,
- influenza,
- rhinopneumonitis,
- strangles,
- rabies, and
- Potomac Horse Fever.

Once the initial series has been given, an annual booster will maintain the immunity of tetanus, sleeping sickness, Potomac Horse Fever, and rabies.

The agents for influenza and rhinopneumonitis are viruses. Strangles is caused by bacteria. None of these stimulates a strong immunity within the horse, so boosters are needed at a minimum of six month intervals. If the horse is frequently in the company of other horses, whether it is in competition or neighborly trail riding, the time between boosters must be shortened to every three months. For these horses we recommend the use of the nasal form of influenza and strangles vaccine. By administering the vaccine as a nasal spray, immunity is created faster and maintained at a higher level.

Winter is an excellent time to deworm. There is little transmission of worms during this time, the cold conditions usually prevent hatching of the worm eggs. The few that do hatch are quickly killed before they can find a blade of grass to climb. By deworming now, the horse will remain worm-free longer. The middle of a hot summer is another good time for deworming. Of course if there are several horses within the herd, you are probably already deworming at quarterly intervals.

Important points to remember about the deworming schedule include alternating products with each deworming, and the larger the herd and the smaller their pasture, the more frequent they need dewormed.

Our horses respond reproductively to increasing daylight hours. Most of the mares stop cycling during the winter (75%). They cannot be bred in the spring until they start cycling. This is the time of year we see many of them start showing some signs of heat. It is important to remember that the first heat

cycle of the season is usually not a fertile one. The follicles are multiple and do not grow large. Ovulation (and signs of heat) may be prolonged as the ovary awakes from its winter sleep. Once ovulation occurs, the egg will be small and weak and does not have a good chance of conceiving and surviving.

So how do we know our mares have started cycling? Of course the best way is to have them examined. But the best way to know if there is even a possibility she has started ovary activity is to check her hair coat. If her hair is turning loose (shedding), her ovaries have started working. If her hair coat is rough and a quick brushing finds only a minimal amount of hair, there is little need for an exam.

If the mare is already pregnant, it is probably time to remove her from all fescue. If the mare is removed from fescue two months prior to the foaling date, there should be little problem with the endotoxin carried by the grass. Two months before foaling is when management of the pregnant mare intensifies. We have a prepared schedule that starts two months prior to foaling and goes through foaling to breeding one month later. It is very detailed with specifics about what to look for in the mare and foal. We will be happy to send a copy upon request. If there are any of our past equine notes or client information sheets ([CLICK HERE](#)) you would like to review you can go to horsedoc.org on the web.

While it may take some time to talk about the timely items necessary to keep our horses current, the completion of them is simple. By keeping their immune system stimulated and their worm load low, they will look and act healthy and be ready to give us the time we enjoy.