

Ask A Vet: Keep Them Healthy-Have Them Vaccinated

Sunday, February 15, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We're new to horse ownership and we board at a barn. The barn manager mentioned it would soon be time for vaccines. What are they going to be vaccinating for and does my horse need all of the vaccines?

Dear Reader,

Vaccines are an important part of having a healthy horse. There's many diseases that can be minimized, if not completely prevented, by observing a vaccine protocol. There are some vaccines that are considered core vaccines. These prevent or minimize illness from diseases that all horses are at risk for. These vary slightly depending on geographic region, but here they include the encephalitis viruses, including West Nile, tetanus, Potomac horse fever and rabies. These diseases are all found in this area and any horse is at risk for exposure. Other commonly vaccinated for diseases include flu and rhino virus. These diseases are only spread from horse to horse so if your horse were not in a boarding barn, never left your property, and did not have any nose to nose contact with other horses, their risk of these diseases is minimal but vaccinating is still an option. Strangles is another optional vaccine that may or may not be recommended. These decisions should be made after a discussion with your vet about your individual horse, the environment your horse is in, and your plans with your horse's future. It's also important to know what the barn policy on vaccination is and what they require. Many boarding facilities will have protocols in place for the health and protection of all the horses on the property.

This is also a good time for your vet too do a full exam on your horse. Not only could there be an undetected health issue that could be addressed, but unhealthy horses may need to postpone vaccination to avoid potentially serious reactions. Many people use this time to also have teeth floated, sheaths cleaned, Coggins drawn, and deworming administered. It's very helpful for the vet if you could be present to discuss any issues that might be detected and to determine any additional course of action.

While it may not seem so yet, spring is just around the corner and vaccinating (especially for mosquito born diseases) is best done prior to the warm wet weather that brings us all, including the bugs, out and about and enjoying our horses!

-Dr. Kathryn Ernst