

March 2019 Equine newsletter

Vaccinations Myths and Truths

With the recent outbreak we felt it might be useful to discuss vaccines and try to put some of the myths to rest.

What do we routinely vaccinate against?

In order to compete most horses are vaccinated against equine influenza (flu) and tetanus. Some competition horses and broodmares are also vaccinated against equine herpes.

Is it true older horses don't require vaccinating if they have been regularly vaccinated when they were younger?

Unfortunately this isn't the case, as an animal ages their immune system can weaken so the older equines are likely to be more susceptible to the diseases we vaccinate against, therefore it is so important we keep vaccinating our friends in their "maturer" years.

Why are vaccinated horses still getting flu?

Vaccination does not prevent horses contracting the disease but primes the immune system to fight off the disease; leading to mild symptoms and shorter duration of illness.

If my horses isn't going anywhere and doesn't interact with other horses does it still need vaccinating?

With the recent outbreak of influenza it has also shown how difficult it is to keep a horse in complete isolation with farriers, physios, vets and other horse owners coming into contact with them. Horses moving to and from your yard can also potentially bring flu back with them and horses hacking past your field can also pose a risk so we strongly advise vaccinating for flu as well as tetanus. The bacteria which causes tetanus is found in the soil so other than vaccinating for tetanus there is no other feasible way of ensuring your horse doesn't get the disease.

What are the signs to look for of flu?

Symptoms include high temperature, nasal discharge and cough. Horses may also show inappetance and lethargy.

Why is treating flu not simple?

Influenza can spread incredibly quickly so isolating cases and any horses that have had direct contact is incredibly important. Influenza can have serious complications and potentially impact the horse for the rest of it's life, particularly if the horse affected is older, has PPID or is a foal. Influenza can also be fatal in unvaccinated horses.



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Why are different organisations recommending boosters every 6 months?

All the evidence shows that an annual vaccination provides adequate protection from the flu virus for the whole year. As we've said, this means the horse is well equipped to fight off the infection if exposed to the virus.

However, theoretically the more recent the booster the greater the immunity; making it less likely that a horse that comes into contact with the virus will pass it on to other horses. As such horses in racing are required to have had a vaccination booster within the last 6 months. The advice from the British equestrian federation is that all horses going to competition should have had a booster within the last 6 months BUT not within 7 days of the event. It seems likely that these rules will come into force at more and more competitions so our advice is to strongly consider an early booster for any competition horse, which has not had one in the last 6 months. PLEASE check the specific rules regarding vaccination with the event you are competing at and any venues you are train at.

Useful information about vaccination for competition can be found

<https://campus.fei.org/course/info.php?id=82>

Why don't we recommend vaccinating all horses against Equine Herpes Virus?

There are five different strains of equine herpesvirus with different strains being responsible for slightly different things from neurological signs, abortions to respiratory disease. The vaccinations are very effective against EHV abortion but less so against respiratory disease. Hence we recommend that pregnant broodmares are vaccinated at 5, 7 and 9 months. However as the EHV vaccine for competition horses needs to be given every 6 months it is generally recommended only for young horses or those at high risk; such as those competing internationally and travelling extensively around the country for shows.

Recommended Influenza and Tetanus Vaccination Timetable

For tetanus on its own:

1st vaccine from 4 months old (if the foal's mother is vaccinated, 1st vaccine at 6 months old)

2nd vaccine 4-8 weeks later

3rd vaccine 1 year after 2nd

Booster every 2 years.

For pregnant mares a booster vaccine is recommended 4-8 weeks prior to foaling.

For Equine Influenza and tetanus:

1st vaccine from 5 months old

2nd vaccine 4-6 weeks later

3rd vaccine 5-7 months

Boosters within a year/ 6 months of the last vaccine- flu annually and flu/tet every two years.

If you would like more information please look at

If you have any questions about vaccinations please don't hesitate to contact us.