

What vaccinations should my horse have?

We are fortunate to have numerous options for proactive preventative care for our horses and ponies. With targeted parasite monitoring and treatment, Hoof care and dental balancing, prevention is always better than cure.

Vaccination is a key part of equine preventative care strategy; but like all things it should be targeted and based on a risk/benefit assessment. The options for vaccination and possible circumstances where they might be appropriate are listed below. Different vaccinations can be given at the same time. If you would like to discuss your specific requirements, please don't hesitate to chat it through with one of our vets.



(Want the short version? Scroll to the end for a TLDR summary!)

Tetanus – Tetanus is a serious and often fatal disease caused by the toxin of Clostridium tetani bacteria. The bacteria lives in soil, dust and manure and is common in the digestive tracts of herbivores and humans. The spores are very resilient and can survive on contaminated surfaces such as rusty metal for several years. It enters the body by breaks in the skin - often but not always by deep puncture wounds – and thrives in anaerobic environments.

Tetanus toxin attacks the nervous system causing constant contraction on the muscles – so severe it can cause paralysis. This usually spreads rapidly through the body and if it affects the muscles of respiration or the heart it can be fatal – this occurs in around 80% of cases. Although treatment is possible this is very costly and often not successful.

Thankfully the vaccine is very effective. The course is 2 vaccinations 4-6 weeks apart with a booster around a year later (this is often administered with the flu vaccine). Tetanus vaccine protection in the horse lasts for 2 years so boosters every other year are necessary. There appears to be a lot of species variation in tetanus susceptibility – in humans' vaccines are thought to last a very long time and vaccines are not routinely given to cats and dogs – horses on the other hand appear to be very susceptible.

We recommend every horse is vaccinated against tetanus – the vaccine is inexpensive and very effective against a horrible disease.

Equine influenza/ Flu – A very highly contagious airborne virus. Flu causes a high temperature, nasal discharge, lethargy and inappetence. In most cases it is self-limiting, but it can lead to pneumonia or secondary infections.

There has been a sharp spike in UK equine influenza in 2026 with 52 reported outbreaks since April the 1st spread over 32 counties.

As with humans, younger and older horses are particularly at risk, but flu is spread rapidly among horses within the same airspace and so Flu vaccination is of great value for livery yards or horses that mix in groups – i.e. competing, pony club, hunt meets etc.

In certain circumstances, where horses stay on the same property and do not mix, the risk of flu can be considered to be low; however, we would recommend Flu vaccination for all other horses.

Equine Herpes Virus – There are several Equine Herpes Virus' but 2 are considered to be significantly clinically relevant in the horse Equine herpes virus 1 and 4 (EHV 1 and EHV 4).

Both EHV viruses are extremely common, and both cause respiratory illness. EHV -1 also causes abortion in pregnant mares and rarely infection can result in devastating neurological disease which is often fatal.

EHV was responsible for the outbreak in Valencia, Spain in February 2021 where 118 horses tested positive for infection and 8 horses were euthanised due to severe neurological symptoms. Spread from this event resulted in cancelling of 78 FEI events over 6 weeks and resulted in fatality in 20 horses.

In the UK there have been 2 neurological EHV cases so far in 2026.

Respiratory disease is much more common, and, in most cases, symptoms are mild to moderate – high temperature, cough and nasal discharge. However, after infection lethargy and poor performance can last for several months.

We recommend vaccination for pregnant mares. Pregnant mares are vaccinated at 5, 7 and 9 months of pregnancy to protect the pregnancy. Vaccination is also recommended for competition horses; or any horse where 3 months off would be upsetting.

Strangles – Strangles is a very contagious respiratory disease caused by the Streptococcus Equi bacteria. It causes infection of the upper respiratory tract, high temperature, nasal discharge and often enlargement of the lymph nodes at the throat. These can abscess leading to swelling which resulted in the “strangles” name.

Strangles is complicated because in some horses these abscesses can burst into the guttural pouches (at the back of the throat) leading to a silent carrier state. These carrier horses are still infectious but not showing any symptoms.

Because of these carriers, in an outbreak horses should not leave the premises until every horse has been tested negative for the disease – this is often complex and costly; Outbreaks often result in yard shutdowns for 2-3 months or even longer.

Strangles is endemic in the population in certain parts of the country; Dartmoor and the new forest for example and outbreaks often happen when a new horse is brought onto a premises.

It is also spread from horse to horse on airborne droplets and can be spread by contaminated kit, clothing or people.

There were 477 positive cases reported in 2025 – this is a huge increase and still probably represents the tip of the iceberg. So far in 2026 there have been 4 outbreaks in the local area, with other horses as part of welfare cases testing positive additionally.

The strangles vaccine is relatively new and offers protection against this disease. We recommend vaccinating horses on livery yards, especially with a high number of horses coming and going. Additionally, any horse that is mixing with many horses it is not already kept with – pony club, hunting, competing.

Summary

Tetanus – in the environment, fatal and horses are very susceptible, every horse should have Tetanus Vaccine.

Influenza/Flu – Extremely contagious respiratory disease, mandatory vaccination for most shows and competition. Recommended for horses competing, mixing with groups of other horses or on livery yards.

Herpes virus – extremely common, highly contagious viral disease-causing respiratory disease, abortion and in rare cases paralysis. Often causes post viral lethargy/poor performance which can last up to 6 months. – recommended for competition horses or any horses where a long period off work would be frustrating. Essential for pregnant mares.

Strangles – extremely contagious bacterial disease, infection can shut down a yard for weeks to months. In rare cases can lead to severe disease or can even be fatal. Recommended for horses on livery yards or those mixing with large numbers of horses from different places i.e.. hunting, pony club etc.

	First two vaccines	Third vaccine	Booster	Pregnancy gestation
Tetanus	4-6 weeks apart	Within a year	Every 2 years	10 months
Influenza	21-60 days apart	4-5 months post 2 nd vaccine	At least every year or every 6 months if high risk	10 months
Equine Herpes	4-6 weeks apart	Within 6 months	Every 6 months	5, 7 and 9 months
Strangles	4 weeks apart	Within 6 months	Every 6 months	5, 7 and 9 months