

## **Ask a vet February 2009**

**Q:** What vaccines does my horse need?

**A:** Ever hear that something is so old it's new again? Or an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure? Well with the infectious disease outbreaks in our horse population this past year, both sayings are worth repeating.

Rabies is a viral neuroinvasive disease that has been known for decades, we all remember Old Yeller and that tragic outcome, but this disease has claimed the lives of human and horses both this past year – in our own backyard! This easily preventable, and fatal, disease was the cause of death for a man in Missouri this past December and has taken the lives of horses in Kansas and Missouri over the past years. Our dogs and cats are required by law to be vaccinated against rabies because it is a zoonotic disease, which means you and I can contract it from animals. Shouldn't our horses be vaccinated? Well, at Wilhite and Frees Equine Hospital, it is part of our core vaccination protocol.

Another disease that has devastated our horse community is Equine Herpes Virus (a.k.a. Rhino, rhinopneumonitis, EHV). This, as well as the Influenza virus, can be contracted via aerosolized respiratory secretions when a horse coughs or blows air out its nostrils. While EHV is typically remembered as a cause of respiratory disease, the neurologic form has claimed the lives of horses recently. Even in a less severe case, the cost of treating a sick horse, and time lost from training, competing, and showing can be expensive.

While these "old" diseases have been in the headlines recently, it is a good reminder that preventative medicine is much cheaper than treating the disease or the loss of your animal. At the same time we vaccinate we perform a brief wellness exam, and complimentary oral exam. For those who travel any distance to shows or competitions, ask your veterinarian about other medications we have available to enhance your horse's immune system and prevention of stress related gastric ulcers while your horse is away from home.

Below you will find a refresher of what we vaccinate against and why. Vaccinations are never absolute protection, but along with good husbandry practices and a customized immunization protocol for your horse, you have done your part to protect your equine companion.

### **Core Vaccination Protocol**

Eastern & Western Encephalomyelitis (E.W.T.) - Spread by blood sucking insects such as mosquitoes. Also known as Sleeping Sickness, causes fatal inflammation of the brain.

Tetanus (E.W.T.) - Clostridium tetani is a spore-forming bacterium in the environment that produces a fatal neurotoxin, contracted through open skin or hoof.

West Nile - Spread by blood sucking insects such as mosquitoes. Causes severe inflammation of the brain.

Rabies - Spread by saliva and/or bite from an infected animal. Severe public health concerns, causes fatal inflammation of the brain

*\*Core vaccines should be administered annually to horses that have previously been vaccinated. Foals (at 5 months), or unvaccinated horses, should receive a total of 3 rounds of immunizations 3-4 weeks apart, then once annually. Pregnant mares should be vaccinated 4-6 weeks prior to foaling.*

### ***Risk-based vaccinations for the Midwest, dependent on travel and exposure***

*Rhinopneumonitis (Herpesvirus 1 & 4, EHV) - Spread horse-to-horse through respiratory droplets in the air, can cause abortion, neurological disease, fever, lethargy, off-feed, nasal discharge, and cough.*

*Influenza (Flu) - Spread the same as rhino, one of the most common respiratory diseases, fever, lethargy, off-feed, cough.*

*Strangles (Strep) - Spread horse-to-horse, or from environment such as shared drinking tanks or feed bunks, causes swollen lymph nodes (typically throatlatch region), nasal discharge, and fever initially. Horses can be carriers that continually spread the bacteria to other horses.*

*Potomac Horse Fever (PHF) - Caused by *Neorickettsia risticii* found in certain snails or mayflies ingested by the horse in the water. Rare for our area, but if traveling east it may be a concern near rivers. Signs include fever and diarrhea.*

*Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA) - Spread by direct contact with an infected horse through respiratory route or venereal route from an infected stallion via artificial insemination or live cover. Clinical signs can look like other diseases: fever, off-feed, swelling of legs or prepuce, and abortion.*

*\*Risk-based vaccines should be discussed with your veterinarian for a customized protocol. Typically, Rhino/Flu is administered twice per year to previously vaccinated horses, other vaccinations may be annual. Foals (at 5 months), or unvaccinated horses, should receive a total of 3 rounds of immunizations 3-4 weeks apart, then once annually. Pregnant mares should receive EHV at the 5th, 7th, and 9th months of gestation.*

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