

To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate

That is the Question

Horses, like humans, are subject to diseases. Some are communicable and can be passed to other horses. Others, like snakebite, are introduced by venomous snakes with only the victim being affected.

Many veterinarians will vaccinate horses with the four core vaccinations according to the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) schedule (1).

ARE VACCINES NECESSARY?

According to Melissa Shelton, DVM, of Minnesota: "I have selected to no longer vaccinate my own horses, who are mature with fully competent immune systems. And this includes for things such as rabies and West Nile Virus."

Dan Moore, DVM, of Tennessee, has been breeding, raising, and showing Mountain Horses for over 25 years and says, "I am personally down to about 50 horses, from once at 250, including nine stallions and multiple brood mares. We show, we travel, we have mares coming and going, meaning lots of potential for exposure, but I don't vaccinate!

"My horses are at least fourth generation vaccine free." He will administer the Tetanus vaccine in special cases.

ARE VACCINES SAFE AS RECOMMENDED?

Dr. Shelton: "I have witnessed over-vaccination fully, as well as the lack of efficacy from normally recommended protocols. I definitely feel I have witnessed harm from over-vaccination, due to currently recommended regimens. Older, ill, or compromised horses definitely show a health crisis after a vaccination event. And the many, many horses that experience soreness or overt pain after vaccines, is quite overwhelming.

"There are options for those who do not wish to vaccinate as aggressively or not at all. I do believe it should be the owners' decision, based on the best information they have for their horse

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Jan Evans

(hopefully along with cooperation from their vet). So many holistically minded people I know are very reluctant to vaccinate a 20+ year-old-horse, and their fears are proven worthwhile when the horse is vaccinated and goes off feed, is super sore, or experiences a health decline closely associated with vaccination. Like we are finding with companion animals, most likely titers will show that vaccines are effective much longer than we currently suspect or recommend for regimens."

ARE VACCINES EFFECTIVE?

According to the AAEP (2): "Vaccination alone, in the absence of good management practices directed at infection control, is not sufficient to prevent infectious disease."

They also warn that immunity for individual horses in a herd can vary, that vaccinations, boosters, and time are necessary for protection, adverse reactions are possible, and vaccines minimize risks but can't prevent disease in all circumstances.

IMMUNE SYSTEM SUPPORT

Dr. Shelton: "A strong immune system is key in any holistic prevention protocol. Research shows the antiviral actions of essential oils.

"My personal horses are supported with regular use of the essential oil blend applications, not only does this provide additional layers of insect repelling action (helpful for prevention of things like West Nile), but I am constantly supporting health in general."

Instead of blindly vaccinating by standard protocols, Dr. Moore advocates creating naturally healthy horses by using homeopathic remedies, probiotics, natural loose sea salt—not blocks or licks—and the naturally chelated micronutrients found in Montmorillonite Clay to enhance and sustain the immune system.

VACCINATION OPTIONS

Dr. Shelton: "As a veterinarian, making the decision to not vaccinate the animals in my own life makes a large statement of how I feel the damage of the vaccine could be, versus the disease risk itself."

Dr. Shelton's horses have not received any vaccinations for over 10 years. Her horses have very good health, with a low risk and exposure level. "Holistically, when horses are vaccinated we can support them for healing from the event with essential oils."

WHEN VACCINATIONS ARE NECESSARY

Sometimes rules and laws require vaccination to show or travel. Vaccine efficacy is highest two to three weeks after vaccination. A horse may need longer to recover from adverse reaction, so vaccinating a month before the event or travel is optimal.

Administering vaccines one at a time with at least a two-week interval between vaccinations gives your horse the advantage of building up immunities against each disease. If there is any adverse reaction, you will know which vaccine caused it. Your veterinarian can report it to the manufacturer and note it in your horse's medical history.

Right after vaccination, move your horse around to increase blood flow and help disperse the vaccine injected into the muscle. Plan to give your horse a few days off to let the body build the antibodies against the disease.

Only healthy horses should be vaccinated. If your horse is stressed due to parasites, overwork, heavy training, allergy outbreak, or any illness, wait until complete recovery before vaccinating. Don't vaccinate if your barn is in the midst of a disease outbreak, as your horse won't have time to build up immunities.

Dr. Dan Moore recommends the homeopathic remedy Thuya Occidentalis after vaccination to help recovery. If there is any adverse reaction, he hopes owners will seek treatment from a holistic veterinarian who practices homeopathy.

VACCINATING YOUR HORSE IS YOUR CHOICE

Protecting your horse's health is your responsibility. Because vaccines are not 100-percent effective against disease, it's important to keep your horse healthy through good management practices.

Keep exposure risk to a minimum by keeping your barn and turnouts clean and free of rodents and birds. Provide clean water and feed, and keep your horse away from horses with unknown backgrounds. Overcrowding, stress, parasites, insects, contaminated water and feed are things that can be controlled to help your horse stay healthy whether you choose to vaccinate or not. ◆

Jan Evans is a Reiki and Certified Equine/Small Animal Acupressure Practitioner. Her horse's Insulin Resistance forced her to learn alternative therapies for treating her mare's frequent bouts of laminitis. She offers acupressure and Reiki to animals in Southern Colorado www.COAnimalAcupressure.com. Jan is also a freelance sales and marketing writer specializing in Natural/Alternative Health markets www.HolisticHealthWriter.com

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