



HELP YOUR HORSE

handle vaccinations

By Madalyn Ward, DVM

There are times when you will need to vaccinate your horse. Knowing how to support him and his immune system will help prevent side effects.

Attitudes about vaccination have changed in the last 20 years. Vaccines were once seen as the best way to prevent many diseases in horses, and their disadvantages weren't often considered. Now we are looking harder at vaccines and understanding the risks of over-vaccination. Ideally, vaccination protocols should be tailored to the individual horse. The vaccines for that horse can then be based on likely exposure to the disease in question, and his ability to mount an adequate response. Titrers may be used to assess

response to previous vaccines or natural exposure. However, the decision to vaccinate is sometimes forced on us since many boarding facilities and horse shows require horses to receive vaccines.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE VACCINATING YOUR HORSE

If you are facing the need to vaccinate your horse, there are things you can do to make the process successful, with minimal negative

effects. Vaccines are designed to be given to healthy horses; many of the negative effects occur in animals that are not in full health. The goal of a vaccine is to stimulate your horse's immune system to mount an immune response to the injected disease antigen, so he will quickly respond in the case of a natural infection. If the horse does not have a strong immune system, the vaccine will not be protective. Ultimately, the protection from disease must come from your horse's response to the vaccine, not the vaccine itself. Chronic conditions such as laminitis,

Continued on next page.

SUPPORT FOR THE *vaccinated horse*

Even when you have determined your horse is healthy enough for vaccines, there are still some steps you can take to help him experience the best response with the fewest negative reactions.

STEP

1 Give your horse five grams of a natural vitamin C product for ten days following his shots.

STEP

2 Give him prebiotics to support his good gut bacteria as he goes through the feverish period following vaccines.

STEP

3 Watch for pain and swelling near the vaccine site and apply warm or cold packs to decrease the inflammation. Homeopathic remedies such as Apis or Ledum may help with immediate post-vaccine discomfort. Fever or pain at vaccine sites is part of a healthy immune response and does not disqualify a horse from future vaccines unless

the reaction is extreme. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Banamine can be given to your horse at the time of vaccination if he has become sore in the past. These drugs will not interfere with the vaccine response, but do have other side effects, so they should not be used unless needed.

STEP

4 Keep a close watch on your horse for several months following vaccination to check for deeper negative reactions that indicate damage to his immune or detoxification systems. Changes in the quality of his hair and hooves, behavior changes, exercise intolerance or weight loss are signs you need to address the condition of vaccinosis. The homeopathic remedy Thuja will often bring your horse back to a condition of health, but future vaccines should be avoided unless the threat of exposure to a fatal disease is imminent.

uveitis, allergies, tendency to colic, cancerous tumors and old age are all signs that a horse is not healthy enough to be given vaccines.

Cushing's and insulin-resistant horses may also react poorly to vaccination. These conditions should be resolved before vaccines are given.

FACTORS THAT WEAKEN YOUR HORSE'S IMMUNE SYSTEM

Inadequate nutrition can also weaken your horse's immune system. Diets low in trace minerals, such as zinc, can result in a weak immune system. Horses that are thin and undernourished should be allowed to gain condition before being vaccinated. If possible, hay should be tested to make sure it provides adequate levels of protein and minerals to support a healthy immune system in your horse. If your hay is low in minerals, then a whole food (such as blue-green algae) may provide the missing trace elements.

Stress is probably one of the biggest enemies of your horse's immune system. Weaning, moving from one barn to another, hard training, showing, inclement weather and poor herd dynamics can all cause enough stress to lower a horse's ability to respond well to vaccines. It is best to vaccinate your horse at a time when he can be in his normal surroundings, have a week or so off from training, and when weather conditions are not extreme.

Vaccines can help prevent disease in healthy horses, but they are not without possible negative effects. Unhealthy horses should not be vaccinated. Healthy horses can be assisted to respond well to vaccines, and treatments can be given to counter bad reactions. Use titers to avoid additional vaccines whenever possible. Kansas State University will do rabies titers and the USDA lab will test for Eastern, Western, Venezuelan and West Nile encephalitis. Your vet should be able to do these tests if you ask for them.

Madalyn Ward is trained in Veterinary Homeopathy, Acupuncture, Bowen Therapy, Network Chiropractic and Equine Osteopathy. Memberships include the American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners and American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association. She has authored three books, *Holistic Horsekeeping*, *Horse Harmony*, *Understanding Horse Types and Temperaments* and *Horse Harmony Five Element Feeding Guide*. Holistichorsekeeping.com, Horseharmony.com.

