

Boost Vaccines in the Fall to Extend Protection

Ask questions, evaluate factors to determine individual needs

DULUTH, Ga. (August XX, 2024) – To boost or not to boost? Horse owners, who traditionally schedule vaccinations for the spring, find themselves asking that question in the fall. In a recent horse owner survey, while 92% said boosting was important, only 55% actually followed through and administered boosters. Why the disparity? Steve Grubbs, DVM, Ph.D., DACVIM, Technical Manager, Boehringer Ingelheim, says while all horse owners understand the need and are in the habit of administering vaccinations in the spring, autumn boosters sometimes fall off the radar.

“By the time fall comes around, horse owners have simply forgotten, or are confused about which boosters they need and whether or not their horse is at risk,” says Dr. Grubbs. He offers some tips to make sure horses are getting the protection they need from disease.

Schedule Wellness Visits

“Think of horses as having semi-annual wellness checks,” Dr. Grubbs says. “Besides administering vaccinations, in both the spring and the fall, the veterinarian can evaluate the horse’s overall health, note any areas of concern and start monitoring those conditions if warranted. Much like people who see their general practitioner on a regular basis, horses should also be seen regularly. And, since they can’t speak, having a veterinarian see the horse can be beneficial to set baselines.”

In addition to giving vaccinations, a veterinarian will check a horse’s weight, teeth, eyes, lymph nodes, limbs and joints. They will also listen to the animal’s heart and lungs.

“Besides having a veterinarian wellness check twice a year, I also recommend horse owners take photographs of their horse in the same position, at the same time of day and in the same spot. Those photographs help document any changes happening over time.”

Discuss Variables

The people best suited to knowing what a horse needs are its owner and the veterinarian. To determine the specific vaccine boosters an individual horse requires, Dr.

Grubbs recommends evaluating the following:

What part of the country does the horse live in?

Some areas, like the south, have insect populations that survive well into the fall and winter months. In these areas, boosting for Eastern and Western equine encephalomyelitis (EEE/WEE) and West Nile virus (WNV) is highly recommended to help horses sustain high levels of immunity.

Is there any travel planned for the horse?

Competition horses and trail horses that travel extensively are subject to exposure to the respiratory pathogens equine influenza (EIV) and equine herpesviruses-1 and -4 (EHV-1/4). Boosting for those diseases can help prevent their spread and keep these active horses healthy throughout the year.

What exposure does the horse have to other horses?

Even if the horse itself isn't traveling, if it is housed with horses that do travel, or in a barn that has a high volume of horses coming and going, the risk of exposure to respiratory disease is higher than if the horse lived alone.

Take Action

Rob Keene, DVM, a professional services veterinarian on the Boehringer team, says horse owners need only consider the cost of vaccinating versus the cost of treating for disease to be motivated to boost in the fall. "Treating a horse for preventable diseases like EEE, WEE and WNV and respiratory disease is far more expensive than giving boosters."

Based on the survey results, horse owners do understand the importance of boosting in the fall, but not all of them follow through. Below are some tips for horse owners to help make sure their horses are getting the protection they need:

- If you haven't scheduled a fall wellness visit yet, it's not too late. Call your veterinarian.
- Develop the habit of scheduling fall boosters during your spring wellness visit.
- When the veterinarian does come, be prepared to discuss your plans for the

horse including competition, trail rides, clinic participation and exposure to other horses.

- Organize your horse's health records to ensure best care. This will help in an emergency as well.
- Know your horse's vital signs.
- If a veterinarian isn't available, educate yourself about the vaccines available for purchase in retail outlets and learn how to administer them.

For more information about horse health care, visit theartofhorse.com.

About Boehringer Ingelheim

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