



Colonial Veterinary Clinic

Small Animals and Horses



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In response to requests for info on routine horse care, I have put together my best advice on the subject. Keep in mind that information on vaccines and parasite control changes regularly, and what was good advice 10 years ago may not apply now.

Wellness Exam: Every horse should have a brief checkup spring and fall before any medications or vaccines are administered. This exam checks feet, mouth, rectal temperature, heart and lungs and is for healthy horses. It can be performed in the owner's absence if the barn manager is present to provide basic information. If the horse is sick or lame, these types of problems should be attended to during a separate visit when the owner is present to discuss the problem with the vet and authorize any treatment.

Core Vaccines: (i.e. all horses need these, as they are diseases they can pick up from biting insects or the pasture environment.

- Rabies
- Tetanus
- Encephalitis (WEE, EEE, VEE)
- West Nile Virus
- Potomac Horse Fever (in areas where this is a problem)

Optional "lifestyle" vaccines: (Only some horses need these; those that are in contact with other horses at large barns, traveling to shows or events, or because of heavy training schedules, or because of a history of problems on a particular farm)

- Rhino/Flu
- Strangles
- Rhinopneumonitis for pregnant mares
- Rotavirus
- EPM

Lab work: All horses are required to have one negative Coggins (EIA) test during their adult life. The test should be repeated yearly if the horse is exposed to other horses at barns, trail rides, or shows. This is important because Equine Infectious Anemia is not treatable, and usually the horse needs to be destroyed if positive.

Selenium. Most Michigan forages are deficient in selenium, a trace mineral that keeps muscles and connective tissue healthy. Selenium deficiencies in our equine patients are rare these days, since the grain mixes all have it added. Yearly selenium testing is a good idea, but only if there has been a documented problem.

Blood profiles for organ function: These are always a good idea for the older horses (around 20 years of age). If we can pick up problems early, there is a much greater opportunity that we can fix them. Blood profiles include tests for liver and kidney function, red and white blood cell counts, electrolytes, and blood sugar, and thyroid hormone.

Deworming:

Horses are constantly exposed to internal parasites from the pasture environment, and the parasite load a horse will carry is dependent on the stocking density of the pasture (i.e., how many horses per acre), previous deworming history, weather (more worms in warm, moist environments), the age of the horse, exposure to infected paddocks at shows and racetracks, etc.

Most modern paste dewormers are safe and easy to use. Their widespread use has significantly reduced worm-related medical problems. How often they should be given depends on some of the factors mentioned above. Horse owners often will deworm every 60 days, based on the life cycle of the strongyle worm, the most common type of internal parasite. However, routine deworming every 60 days is probably excessive in Michigan since the "60-day cycle" is under ideal warm-weather conditions. Worm development in the environment almost comes to a halt in the frozen conditions of a typical Michigan winter. Many backyard horses need deworming only 1-2 times per year if they have lots of room, the manure is composted instead of spread (heat will kill the worms) and they have no new horses brought onto the place. For most horses in a large boarding facility deworming every 3 months should be adequate. The exact timing is not as important as trying to get all horses dewormed at the same time, or within a few days of each other.

Which product to use: Volumes have been written about which dewormer to use when, and many confusing charts have been constructed. "Rotational Deworming", which gained popularity in the 1980s, is a commonly used practice in Michigan. The idea is to use a different dewormer every time so that the worms do not develop resistance to one. The only problem is that there is no science to prove this works. In fact, some evidence shows the opposite, i.e, using multiple products only causes resistance to develop to multiple products !

I am currently recommending using the same dewormer every 3 months until it quits working for us. (This usually takes years) We determine its effectiveness by running fecal tests once or twice yearly. To determine the average worm level on the farm, you would want to test the stool right *before* deworming. To determine the effectiveness of the dewormer, you would want to test the stool about one week *after* deworming. At present, ivermectin-containing products seem to work well, are easy to use, and inexpensive. They also kill bots. It is probably a good idea to give an ivermectin-based product that also kills tapeworms, usually in the fall, but the jury is still out on whether this is really important. The experts are not sure if tapeworms cause any disease in the horse.



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