



VACCINATIONS

VACCINATION NECESSARY EVIL OR HEALTH BOOSTER ?

It is important to analyse why we vaccinate our horses, and to discuss whether vaccination is still necessary. Every year horror stories about vaccinations, human or animal, do make the headlines of our national press. Read on to find out why vaccination is still one of the ways in which you can ensure your horse remains as healthy as possible.

Which diseases can you vaccinate your horse against?

The most common vaccines available are against tetanus, flu and herpes. Although some other vaccines are available, they are usually only advised in exceptional circumstances.

Tetanus is a disease caused through wound infection by clostridium tetanus, a spore forming bacteria. If horses develop the disease it is very often fatal because the toxin does affect the nerve system.

Flu is caused by the influenza virus which can travel several miles in the air. Flu causes symptoms of severe colds but one of the many more long term side effects can be long term weakness of the lungs and loss of performance for several months. If your horse contracts flu, a very long rest period will be necessary. Many horses are left with permanent lung damage after contracting flu.

Herpes is a virus, usually causing respiratory infection, and occasionally causing outbreaks of abortion or paralysis of horses. This disease could be the most common cause of severe colds in horses at the present time. Loss of performance often follows the herpes injection.

What is a vaccine?

A vaccine is made up of attenuated strains of the infectious agents or small bits of the virus or bacteria. This is then mixed with an immunity enhancing liquid, so that the body can have a maximal reaction against it. The body will produce antibodies against the vaccine, which can be used by the animal in the face of an infection to destroy the infectious agents.

If vaccinated, the animal has protection mechanism ready and the signs of the disease will be milder or non existent.

Does vaccination work?

If reminders (boosters) are given in time vaccination will certainly give some protection against disease. Vaccination does not mean that the disease can never strike again. Failure of a vaccination regime could be caused by one of the following reasons:-

1. The interval between boosters is too long.
2. The horse did not react sufficiently to vaccinations because its immune system was not working at the time.
3. Some viruses keep changing their appearance every couple of years. The vaccinated animal may only partly react to a new strain of virus.

Why should you vaccinate?

Vaccination against tetanus is absolutely essential because this disease is a killer. Vaccination against flu and herpes is advisable, as it will protect against respiratory disease which can have nasty long term consequences. Flu is thought to be an important inciting factor for dust allergies.

Remember group vaccinations are protective against outbreaks of the disease than the individual vaccinations. This is why many livery yards and all show organisations insist on proper vaccination against flu. If your horse competes, an up to date passport with markings and vaccinations, signed by us, will be necessary.

When do you start vaccinations?

If your horse is not vaccinated properly against tetanus, yesterday! Foals can start their initial vaccination at the age of 5 months. Until then they still have protection through their dam.

Should you vaccinate your horse if it never mixes with others?

If your horse **never** mixes with others it should certainly still be vaccinated against tetanus. Flu and herpes are optional, but remember these infections travel several miles through the air. It is therefore not uncommon for horses that are kept separate from other horses to still catch nasty diseases. Because these horses do not mix with other horses regularly, their natural protection will be

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lower than that of horses that regularly compete.

What are the side effects of vaccination?

To the best of our knowledge, long term effects from vaccinations are extremely rare. Some people claim that vaccination has caused a rise in cases of dust allergies. This is almost certainly an old wives tale, and in fact the diseases of herpes and flu themselves are one of the most common causes of dust allergy.

Vaccination can cause some rare and transient side effects

These can be pain in the injection site for a couple of days, or even abscessation of the injection site. Sometimes horses develop a minor cold shortly after vaccination. This is thought to be caused by concurrent infection with another virus at the time of vaccination. It is almost certainly not a direct effect of the vaccination.

Conclusion

Vaccination is good way of protecting your horse from ill health. Competing horses will be required to have an up to date passport. The annual booster is a good time to discuss health issues with us and a minor health check can be carried out free of charge at this time. Annual teeth care can be carried out at the same time, by one of our qualified vets.

VACCINATION REGIMES

Tetanus

Initial	
2nd booster	3 - 6 weeks after
Regular booster	roughly every year

Flu

Initial	
2nd booster	between 21 - 92 days after 1st (3 - 6 weeks advisable)
3rd booster	between 150 - 215 days after 2nd (5 - 7 months)
Regular booster	annually, within 1 year of the previous injection

Herpes

Initial	
2nd booster	3 - 6 weeks after
Regular booster	every 5 - 7 months thereafter

Vaccinations for all these diseases can be combined and given on the same day.
