



Vaccinations

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, new horror stories about vaccinations, human or animal, 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 infection.

Why should you vaccinate?

Vaccination against tetanus is absolutely essential because this disease is a killer. Vaccination against flu and herpes is advisable, even if your horse doesn't mix with others, 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. Horses kept separately often have lower natural protection against disease.

Remember group vaccinations are more protective against outbreaks of 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 a vet, will be necessary.

Vaccination is a 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.

	Initial	2nd booster	3rd booster	Regular booster
Tetanus	From 3 months old	3-6 weeks after 1st	N/A	Roughly every year
Flu	From 6 months old	21-92 days after 1st	150-215 days after 2nd	Annually, within 1 year of previous injection
Herpes	From 6 months old	3-6 weeks after 1st	N/A	Every 5-7 months thereafter

What is a vaccine?

A vaccine is made up of accentuated 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 then produce antibodies against the vaccine, which can be used by the animal in the face of an infection to help 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 it's 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

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 most 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, but is almost certainly not a direct effect of the vaccine itself.

When do you start vaccinations?

If your horse isn't vaccinated properly against tetanus, yesterday! Foals can start their initial vaccination at the age of 6 months if their mother is fully vaccinated. Tetanus vaccination should be done earlier, at 3 months, if the dam is unvaccinated. You should then start a primary course at 6 months.