

Vaccinations protect your horse

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Disease prevention through vaccination is an essential part of horse management. If you are lucky enough not to need your vet for an emergency this year, you should still make sure you see him or her for your horse's vaccinations and check-up. The health check is an ideal time to discuss with your vet how your horse has been over the year, identify whether there are any areas of concern which need monitoring or investigating, and discuss any questions or concerns that you may have regarding your horse's health and management.

Vaccinating against equine influenza (flu)

Equine influenza spreads rapidly and can have significant economic implications due to loss of performance as well as the ill health of an infected horse. Therefore, vaccination is often compulsory for horses entering competitions, particularly if they are run under FEI rules. You should check that your horse is vaccinated to meet local requirements before setting off for a competition. Even if your horse isn't competing, it is important to protect them against the unpleasant ill effects of equine influenza.

Foals should start their flu vaccinations from around about five months of age. The initial course for foals and adults is two injections given generally four to six weeks apart, with a third injection required around five to six months later. Following this first third injection, the manufacturer's recommendation for subsequent flu booster vaccination should be followed and is typically every 12 months. If you are competing your horse,



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you will also need to make sure that the vaccinations are given in accordance with the governing body for your particular sport. For most governing bodies, standard manufacturer recommendations are sufficient for competition. However some organisations, such as the FEI, require six monthly intervals between flu vaccines and a period of time between vaccination and competition (usually seven days i.e. a horse cannot compete within seven days of receiving a flu vaccination). Be careful to check the rules of any competition before you leave for an event.

The guidelines that most competition organisers follow are those stipulated by the Jockey Club Rules. These are as follows:

- Time from 1st – 2nd vaccination: 21 – 92 days.
- Time from 2nd – 3rd vaccination: 150 – 215 days.
- Annual booster vaccinations must be given within a 365 day period.

There are usually no side effects experienced following a flu vaccination. However, on occasion a horse may become stiff or develop a swelling at the site of vaccination. Some horses can show mild transient flu like symptoms e.g. a high temperature. Your veterinary surgeon will be able to discuss what side effects your horse may experience. If you are worried that your horse is having a reaction, you should always contact your veterinary surgeon for advice. However, your horse cannot develop the flu from the vaccination.

Vaccinating your horse against equine herpes virus

Equine herpes (EHV) can cause respiratory signs, neurological disease and can have implications for breeding mares if infected, including risk of abortion. Not every horse requires an EHV vaccine and you should discuss with your vet whether this vaccine is appropriate for your horse. The initial vaccination course is two injections given 4-6 weeks apart. However, the booster interval is shorter, with boosters being required every six months. Pregnant mares require vaccination at 5, 7 and 9 months of gestation. If you feel that your horse would benefit from being vaccinated against EHV then contact Central Equine Vets for further information regarding EHV vaccination.

Vaccinating your horse against tetanus

Tetanus vaccination is recommended for all horses, whether or not your horse leaves the yard or meets other horses,

as the organism responsible for infection lives in soil. The initial (primary course) vaccination again starts with two injections given 4-6 weeks apart, and can be given from six months of age.

Following the initial course, booster injections are given every one to three years, depending on the vaccine manufacturer's instructions. Therefore, it is important to check with your vet what the relevant booster interval is for your horse.

As with other equine vaccines, side effects are not common, but on occasion, horses may become stiff or sore around the site of injection after it is given and you should contact your veterinary surgeon for advice if you suspect that this has occurred.

Other equine vaccinations

In addition to the vaccinations already mentioned, there are other vaccines that are usually only used in high-risk areas or in breeding horses, and not all of which are available in the UK.

Rotavirus can cause diarrhoea in young foals, but it rarely affects older animals. An equine rotavirus vaccine is available to stimulate immunity in mares so that their milk contains specific antibodies, which give their foals protection during their first few months of life. Mares are vaccinated during their 8th, 9th and 10th months of pregnancy.



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