

## Vaccinations



There are vaccinations available against a number of equine diseases, but the most commonly used are those that provide protection against equine influenza and tetanus. Your vet can advise you which vaccines are most appropriate for your horse depending on his age, where he is kept and what activities he is used for.

### Equine Influenza

This is a type of influenza specific to horses and is a viral disease that is highly contagious and spreads rapidly between horses kept in close proximity. The accompanying nasal discharge is highly infectious but the disease also spreads through the airborne route.

Small outbreaks occur in the UK periodically but are generally contained due to the fact that a high percentage of the equine population in the UK is now vaccinated against the disease. However, an outbreak of equine flu seriously damaged the horse industry in Australia two years ago, where influenza had not previously been experienced and thousands of horses suffered the disease.

### Clinical signs

High temperature, depression, lethargy, coughing and nasal discharge.

### Vaccination programme

The initial programme involves a primary course of two injections one to three months apart followed by a third injection six months later. Annual boosters are then necessary to maintain a constant level of protection.

Foals can be vaccinated from five months old and need to be vaccinated once they are mixing with other horses.

There is a low incidence of side effects to the vaccine but it is recommended that horses are given six to seven days off work after the primary vaccinations and one to two days after subsequent boosters.

Under the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) rules the second injection must be given between 21-92 days after the first, with a gap of between 150-215 days before the third. Annual boosters must be given within 365 days.

All horses that compete in FEI\* competitions must have received the second injection between 21 and 92 days after the

administration of the first dose and the third dose must be given within 6 months +21 days of the second dose. Annual boosters must be given within 365 days and if the horse is scheduled to take part in an FEI competition, the last booster must have been given within 6 calendar months + 21 days of the day of competition or of entry to the FEI stables, whichever is the sooner. Horses competing regularly consequently require twice yearly boosters.

\* FEI is the international governing body of all the Olympic equestrian disciplines.

## Tetanus

Tetanus vaccination should be standard in all horses. Tetanus spores of the bacteria clostridium tetani live in the soil and are therefore widespread in the environment. Spores may enter wounds and under certain conditions, particularly those found in puncture wounds and foot abscesses, release a toxin that can severely damage the horse's nervous system.

## Clinical signs

In the early stages of tetanus, signs include protrusion of the third eyelid, twitching and spasm in the ears, drawing back of the lips, flaring of the nostrils, a stiff neck and abnormal carriage of the tail.

As the disease progresses, further signs include: marked stiffness in the limbs, difficulty swallowing and drinking (sometimes known as 'lockjaw'), difficulty standing, profuse sweating, grunting, respiratory distress and seizures.

## Vaccination programme

The vaccination programme consists of two injections administered four to six weeks apart followed by a booster nine to 12 months later and then every two years.

Foals are often given tetanus antitoxin (TAT) at birth and then gain ongoing protection against tetanus through their mother's milk provided the mare has been vaccinated.

The vaccines against equine flu and tetanus are available in a combined vaccine so it is worth consulting with your vet to see if the two vaccinations could be administered in one dose.



## Equine Herpes

Among the other diseases that can be vaccinated against, the most common is herpes virus or EHV. Equine herpes has a respiratory and abortion form.

The respiratory form presents as a flu-like syndrome and exists widely among the UK horse population. The vaccine is available should you decide to maximise the protection of your horse against respiratory disease caused by viruses.

The vaccination of pregnant mares against EHV may be recommended by your vet if he/she considers there is a significant risk of a mare being exposed to EHV during pregnancy. Mares are vaccinated at five, seven and nine months of pregnancy in order to reduce the likelihood of a herpes induced abortion.