

General Vaccination Information

Vaccination is a method of disease prevention whereby the immune system is stimulated to produce antibodies against specific diseases. Many of these diseases are viral and no effective means of treatment exist. Several factors are necessary for vaccines to prevent disease:

- 1) Selecting the right vaccine
- 2) Proper vaccine handling
- 3) Timing of vaccination
- 4) The ability of the horse to mount a proper immune response

Choosing the right vaccine is necessary to provide appropriate protection for your horse. It is important to remember, because a vaccine is available does not mean it is necessary. Horses have different vaccination needs based on age, geographic location and use. Proper vaccine selection goes beyond which disease to vaccinate against, but also which type of vaccine to use. Many different vaccine choices exist including, killed, live, attenuated and chimeric. Each vaccine has its pros and cons. Selection should be based on the horse's individual needs.

Proper vaccine handling is necessary for successful disease prevention. Vaccines have a narrow temperature range for storage. Too warm or too cold the vaccine will be damaged and its effectiveness will be decreased. Ultraviolet light will also damage and render many vaccines ineffective. Vaccines must be maintained at an appropriate temperature and away from UV light. Using a vaccine which has been improperly handled could result in poor protection, or a reaction harming your horse. By using vaccines provided by your veterinarian you can feel assured everything possible has been done to insure proper handling.

Another consideration is timing of vaccine. The goal is to have maximum protection when the disease is circulating in the environment. If a disease is more prevalent in the summer, horses should be vaccinated in the spring ensuring maximum antibodies are present when the horse is most likely to be exposed. Some vaccines do not produce long standing immunity and need boosted during the disease transmission season.

The vaccine is only half the answer to developing immunization; the ability of the horse to mount a proper immune response is the rest of the story. Once the vaccine is in the body the immune system must produce antibodies. Several factors may prevent the immune system from producing antibodies, such as stress and concurrent infection or disease. Animals with an elevated temperature or other signs of illness should not be vaccinated.

It is important to consult your veterinarian before vaccinating your horse. They can assist you in the selection and timing of vaccines. By performing a thorough physical exam your veterinarian can determine if your horse is in proper health to maximize the response to vaccination. Not only will this help with the effectiveness of vaccination, it may also aid in finding other health problems. Your veterinarian can assist you in determining which diseases your horse is at risk for and the best way to protect against these diseases.