March is Equine Wellness Month. Oklahoma State University's Center for Veterinary Health Sciences joins the American Association of Equine Practitioners and Bayer Healthcare in recommending that all horse owners use the following information to help keep their horses healthy.

Appropriate vaccinations are the most cost-effective weapon against common infectious diseases of the horse. Vaccines can help fight off some familiar problems: tetanus (lockjaw), encephalomyelitis (sleeping sickness), rabies, West Nile virus, rhinopneumonitis, influenza, strangles, botulism (shaker foal syndrome), equine viral arteritis (EVA), and Potomac Horse Fever.

Several factors help determine the specific immunizations needed by a particular horse including environment, age, use, exposure risk, geographic location and general management. Your regular veterinarian can recommend the best vaccination program for your horse.

A good immunization protocol is essential to responsible ownership. Just as in humans, vaccination does not guarantee 100 percent protection. In some situations, it may decrease the severity of the disease but not prevent it completely. Consult your veterinarian today.

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Oklahoma State University is a modern land-grant university. OSU's Center for Veterinary Health Sciences is the only veterinary college in Oklahoma. One of 28 veterinary colleges in the United States, it is fully accredited by the Council on Education of the American Veterinary Medical Association. The center's Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital is open to the public and provides routine and specialized care for small and large animals. It also offers 24-hour emergency care and is certified by the American Animal Hospital

Association. OSU is preparing students for a brighter future and building a brighter world for all. OSU improves the lives of people in Oklahoma, the nation, and the world through integrated, high quality teaching, research and outreach. For more information, visit www.cvhs.okstate.edu
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SIDEBAR

Equine Disease Summary – always consult your regular veterinarian

Tetanus or Lockjaw

- Caused by toxin-producing bacteria in the intestinal tract or in the soil
- Spores can exist for years
- Spores enter through wounds, lacerations or umbilicus of newborn foals
- Not contagious from horse to horse

- Poses a constant threat to horses and humans; 80 percent of affected horses die

- All horses should be immunized; boosters for mares and foals may be recommended

Encephalomyelitis or Sleeping Sickness

- Caused by the Western Equine Encephalomyelitis (WEE) virus or the Eastern version (EEE)

- WEE found throughout North America; EEE appears only in the East and Southeast; VEE (Venezuelan variety) has occurred in Mexico but not in the U.S.

- Transmitted by mosquitoes that acquired the virus from birds and rodents

- Humans are susceptible when bitten by an infected mosquito

- Horse-to-horse or horse-to-human transmission is rare

- 20%-50% of WEE infected horses die; 75%-100% of animals with EEE die; 40%-80% of VEE infected horses die

- All horses need annual EEE and WEE vaccine (usually before mosquitoes become

active); pregnant mares and foals may require additional vaccines

Rabies

- More common in some areas than others
- Horses infected infrequently but death always occurs
- Transmitted from horses to humans

West Nile Virus

- Affects horses in the continental U.S.
- Transmitted through infected mosquito bite
- More persistent mosquito populations may require more aggressive vaccinations and mosquito control

Rhinopneumonitis

- Two viruses, equine herpesvirus type 1 (EHV-1) and equine herpesvirus type 4 (EHV-4), cause two different diseases both known as rhinopneumonitis.

- Both cause respiratory tract problems

- EHV-1 may also cause abortion, foal death and neurological signs

- Spread by aerosol and by direct contact with secretions, utensils or drinking water

- Virus may not be apparent in carrier animals

- All pregnant mares must be immunized

- Foals, weanlings, yearlings and young horses under stress should also be vaccinated

- Immune protection is short; pregnant mares are vaccinated at a minimum during the 5th, 7th and 9th months of gestation; high-risk youngsters need a booster every six months at least

Influenza

- Highly contagious
- Transmitted by aerosol from horse-to-horse up to 30 yards (by snorting or coughing)
- Recovery time for most horses is about 10 days
- Duration of protection is short lived; revaccination is recommended every six months
- Animals that travel or are exposed to other horses should be regularly immunized

Strangles

- Highly contagious
- Rarely fatal disease
- Vaccination may have side effects

Botulism or Shaker Foal Syndrome (young horses)/Forage Poisoning (older horses)

- Shaker Foal Syndrome can be serious
- Forage Poisoning can be fatal
- Vaccines not available for all types of botulism
- Pregnant mares can be vaccinated in endemic areas

Equine Viral Arteritis

- Complicated disease
- Can result in some breeding restrictions and export problems

Potomac Horse Fever

- Seasonal problem with geographic factors

- Mortality rate varies from 5 percent to 30 percent

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