

Vaccinations for your horse

Vaccinating your horse

A regular vaccination programme is a vital part of preventative health care for you horse, pony or donkey. The diseases we commonly vaccinate for are serious conditions which have the potential to be life-threatening. In addition, if you want your horse to compete, many governing bodies require you to adhere to strict vaccination protocols to be eligible.

At the practice we run a reminder system to help you keep your vaccination up to date. As part of this service we try to ensure that all our clients receive a reminder when vaccination boosters are due. This service will help you keep your horse protected. However, we would remind you that it is ultimately your own responsibility to ensure all vaccinations for your horse are up to date. If you have any doubt regarding your own horse's vaccination status, feel free to contact the surgery for advice or speak to your sport's governing body to check their rules about vaccination requirements.

Equine Influenza (flu)

Influenza is a respiratory virus which causes fever, depression, nasal discharge and coughing. Although in adult horses the virus is rarely life-threatening, by damaging the cells within the trachea (windpipe) they are more susceptible to getting bacterial pneumonia which can be serious in horses of all ages. The influenza virus is highly contagious, being transmitted through droplets in the air, directly between horses and transported on people's hands and clothing.

When does my horse need vaccination for 'flu'

The primary course includes three vaccinations. The second inoculation is given 21-92 days after the first. The third inoculation is given 150-215 days after the second. To keep your horse's flu protection up to date, a booster vaccination should be given each year at less than a 365 day interval.

Horses are generally considered eligible to compete 7 days after the second vaccination. In international competitions, whilst horses are allowed to compete 7 days after the second vaccination, they must also have been vaccinated within 6 months of the competition date. For many horses this means they require twice yearly booster vaccinations.



Tetanus

Tetanus is a bacterial infection which is usually fatal. For that reason we advise that all horses, ponies and donkeys should be vaccinated against this disease. The spores of the bacterium *Clostridium tetani* live in the soil and horses can get the disease when the spores enter skin wounds.

When does my horse need vaccinating for tetanus?

The tetanus course is only two vaccinations, the second one given 4-6 weeks after the first. The first booster vaccination is given after a year and all subsequent boosters are given at two year intervals.

Equine Herpes Virus

There are numerous strains of herpes virus that affect the horse but we are only able to vaccinate against EHV-1 and EHV-4. These can cause respiratory infections similar to equine influenza and also cause abortion in pregnant mares. Very rarely outbreaks of the respiratory form of herpes virus can be followed by horses developing severe neurological disease. There is some debate about whether vaccination can prevent this more severe form of the disease. Our standard vaccination protocol at the practice does not include herpes virus. If you wish for your horse to be vaccinated against the herpes virus, please specify this to the receptionist to ensure that the vets bring the correct vaccines.

When does my horse need vaccinating for the herpes virus

- For respiratory and neurological disease prevention:
 - The second inoculation should be given 4-6 weeks after the first. The horse then requires a booster vaccination every 6 months.
- For pregnant mares:
 - Three vaccination should be given to the mare at 5, 7 and 9 months of pregnancy.

West Nile Virus

West Nile virus is an exotic viral disease which is currently found in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and the USA. The virus is spread between mosquitoes and birds and, occasionally, humans and horses may be infected when bitten by a carrier mosquito. Approximately 90% of infected horses won't show any symptoms but the 10% that do suffer from serious neurological dysfunction, including in-coordination, paralysis, fever, inability to swallow, loss of vision, muscle tremors and facial nerve paralysis. 38-57% of these cases are fatal. To date there have been no cases of West Nile virus in the UK horse population. There have been reports of UK birds showing an immune response to the virus but no live virus has been isolated from these animals.

Our advice is to vaccinate any horse that travels abroad for competition or before exportation to high risk countries. At present, as there have been no cases in the UK **we are not** recommending vaccinating every horse in the UK population. We are closely watching how this disease spreads and as soon as the live virus is isolated from birds in the UK, or a UK horse is infected, we will advise to start an appropriate vaccination protocol.

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