

Basic Health Care and Management

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There are 4 basic aspects of health care, besides providing an adequate, well-balanced diet, which are important to maintain optimum health, vitality and ability to work in your horse and pony. Regular attention to teeth care, worming, hoof care and vaccination will help ensure freedom from colic, maintain optimum food utilisation, sustain sound hooves and ensure a long, productive and healthy life for your horse.

1. Preventative Dental Care

As part of good care and feeding management, your horse's teeth should be checked and floated to remove any dental problems at set intervals during the horse's life or, alternatively, when the telltale signs become apparent. It is important that this is carried out only by an equine veterinarian or an experienced, qualified equine dentist to prevent any detrimental consequences occurring to your horse.

Symptoms of dental problems in horses include loss of condition, increased time to eat a meal, dropping or 'quidding' of saliva soaked feed which falls from the horse's mouth while eating, reluctance to consume dry fibrous feeds and passing of long particles of hay or whole grain in the droppings, as well as a tendency to toss the head upwards and pull away when pressure is applied to the bit.

One of the most common dental problems in horses is the formation of sharp edges on the edges of the cheek teeth on the upper and lower jaws. These occur because the lower jaw is not as wide as the top jaw and as a horse chews, the jaw moves in a circular motion. The hard enamel coating along the edges of the teeth does not wear away as quickly, resulting in the development of sharp edges on the **outside edges of the top cheek teeth and inside edges of the lower cheek teeth**. This can cause painful abrasions and lacerations to the mouth membranes as a horse chews its food.

Handy Hint 1 Have your Horse's Teeth Checked on a Regular Basis

Routine checks are recommended every 3-6 months for young horses from yearlings to 5 years of age, whilst **mature horses should be checked annually and aged horses every 3-6 months**. If your horse is coming back into work after a spell at grass, have the teeth checked during the **first week** so as to avoid any discomfort from the bit and ensure it can efficiently chew and utilise its 'hard' feed. If your aged horse has dental problems, it is recommended to **remove decayed or worn-away teeth** to prevent toxicity, and feed soft mashes, pelleted or extruded feeds which are easier to chew and digest.

2. Strict Control of Internal Parasites (Worms)

Regular and programmed worm control is essential to the health and well-being of every horse. Infection with internal parasites can cause serious detrimental health effects to your horse, as well as increase the risk of other horses it may come in contact with becoming infected with worms too. It is important as an owner, to practice **good dosing technique**, follow recommended **drenching strategies**, such as rotational drenching, regular frequency of worming and **maintain good pasture, yard and stable hygiene**.

The four main types of worms which are common in horses and can cause health problems, include Large Strongyles (**Bloodworms**) and Small Strongyles (**Small Redworms** or Cyathostomes) in the large bowel or hind gut, Ascarids (**Large Roundworms**) in the small bowel, Oxyuris spp (**Pinworms**) in the lower large bowel and Gasterophilus spp (**Bot Fly Larvae**) in the stomach

Symptoms may include a dull rough coat, loss of condition, poor performance, ill-thrift, lethargy, depression, colic, excessive tail rubbing, diarrhoea and young horses may develop a 'pot', or soft rounded, belly.

To obtain the best benefit from a drenching program, it is recommended to use a broad-spectrum anthelmintic (wormer) to provide protection against all major internal parasites and to follow the guidelines on the product label to ensure optimum results.

Handy Hint 2 Ensure the Correct Dose Rate and Avoid Waste when giving a Paste Wormer

You must ensure that you give the correct dose rate for the **weight of your horse**, as under-dosing can increase the likelihood of resistance build-up to the active ingredient in the wormer, resulting in a far less protected horse. Also take note of the **drench frequency** suggested on the label. After dosing the wormer over your horse's tongue with the syringe of paste, **hold your horse's head up** under his chin for 30 secs to ensure that the **full dose is swallowed and the paste is not spat out**.

Handy Hint 3 Use a Granule Wormer in the Feed for Horse which is difficult to Paste

There are a number of granule wormers and a pelleted wormer available for horses which are difficult to paste and risk injury to themselves and you. Most horses will accept these in the feed, although a horse may still refuse to eat the feed or sift out the wormer. Other horses will take it more readily if a mixed into a sweetened feed, or tempted by adding a small amount (30mL) of Energy-Gold oil with garlic flavouring to a double handful of feed. If all else fails, try freezing the granules or pellets in a freezer, then quickly add the frozen wormer to 2 litres of **cold** (not warm) sweet bran mash - the horse will not be able to smell or taste the frozen wormer - and most horses will eat the feed before they realise they have been wormed!

In pastured horses, drenching should usually occur every 6-8 weeks, however, this can vary slightly relative to the active ingredients used in different brands. Rotating the wormer annually is an important strategy, as over time, worms can develop resistance to the active ingredient in the wormer being used. Once resistance has developed against one worming compound and worms which survive will pass it on, so it can take years before the worms lose the ability to resist and again become susceptible. The active ingredient may be one or more of a number of related compound groups, such as Benzimidazoles (fenbendazole, oxbendazole), Praziquantel (for tapeworms) Avermectins (ivermectin, moxidectin) and Tetrahydropyrimidines (pyrantal). Many of the wormer brands have one or a combination of these ingredients. Worms can build a resistance to one or more compounds and therefore, the compound group needs to be rotated to reduce the development of resistance.

Handy Hint 4 Adopt Strict Pasture, Yard and Stable Hygiene

Picking up and removing horse droppings at least twice weekly from yards and small paddocks is 5-10 times more effective in reducing worm infection than worming alone. Heaping up manure in a pile and hosing to keep it moist to compost (ferment), produces heat which quickly kills worm eggs and larvae. The after 2- 3 weeks, the composted manure can then be returned to the pasture as fertiliser without risk of spreading worms and return up to 83% of recycled nutrients to the soil.

The following are some pasture hygiene management strategies which can be put into practice to aid in parasite control:

- Worm all horses in the same paddock on the same day, then move them to a clean spelled paddock around 48 hours later after they have passed out the dead worms and their eggs.
- Don't overgraze or overstock pastures so as to ensure horses are not forced to graze near manure piles where worm eggs and larvae are more plentiful.
- Avoid feeding from the ground- provide a safe feed bin, such as a recycled tyre bin.
- Rotate paddocks with other livestock, such as cattle and sheep, to break the worm lifecycles.
- Spelling paddocks can reduce egg and larvae populations, ideally for a minimum of 4-6 **weeks under hot/ dry summer conditions, 10-12 weeks in cold winter/frosty weather** and **6-8 months in autumn/spring** when weather is warm or moist which facilitates prolonged worm egg and larval survival.
- Use faecal egg counts(manure egg counts) (FEC's) to monitor the success of your worming program to determine if the wormer being used is working and to help reduce drug resistance. Manure samples for worm egg counts should taken **6 weeks after the last worming** to allow time for resistant worms to mature to produce eggs in the droppings.

3. Regular Hoof Care

Regular hoof trimming and maintenance is an essential management practice for all horses. In young growing horses, frequent care is essential for the correction of poorly shaped hooves as well as minor limb deviations during the 3-12 month old age period. Problems, such as limb deviations however, must be corrected regularly on a 4 week cycle. For any other horses that don't require corrective trimming/shoeing, it is recommended that hooves should be trimmed on a 6-8 week basis. Many horse owners adopt bare foot trimming for pleasure and lightly worked horses and ponies, but the hooves may require more regular trimming if they grow more rapidly.

Handy Hint 5 Apply a Hoof Preparation to Minimise Hoof Moisture Variations

A horse's hooves can lose 15% of their internal moisture through the sole every day when standing in dry sandy yards, which can result in sole cracks and brittle hooves. Under wet conditions, the soles can absorb up to 10% excess moisture, reducing their ability to support weight and allow bacteria in the soil to enter the under-sole area through minute cracks in the softened sole, resulting in a hoof abscess. Kohnke's Own Hoof-Seal® is a blend of biodegradable wood tars and oils, with added 'breathable' polyurethane, which dries to a thin film to help minimise moisture variations and associated cracks and dryness. Apply a thin coating of Hoof-Seal® to the whole hoof for 3 consecutive days, and thereafter once a week to the hoof wall and sole, and in dry or wet weather, an extra mid week application to the soles only.

Wet weather can soften hooves, which on rough or stony country will increase the risk of hoof infections and breakaway on the edge of the walls, resulting in flat soles and misshapen hooves which can twist limbs out of alignment as a result of extra weight bearing and turning during exercise. A twice weekly application of Kohnke's Own Hoof-Seal® to the hoof walls and soles during wet weather will help to reduce the risk of soft hooves, bruising and infection.

Handy Hint 6 Dressing the Hooves for Competition

On show or competition day, mix 10mL BLACK-IT™ with 40mL Hoof-Seal and paint a thin coating onto the hoof wall with the Hoof-Seal® brush to give an even, natural, low sheen dressing to the hooves. It helps maintain the hooves at normal moisture levels and makes the BLACK -IT™ easy to remove.

4. Keep Up Yearly Vaccinations

Primary vaccinations for tetanus and strangles can be carried out as early as 2-3 months of age, however, it is best to delay the vaccination course until weaning as a young horse's immune response may be compromised by infection with the active stage of Equine Herpes Virus in early life.

Handy Hint 7 Give Regular Tetanus Toxoid Boosters

Tetanus vaccination is a course of 2 needles given into the muscle 4 weeks (one month) apart to ensure the best long term immunity. A booster should be given if a horse sustains a severe lower limb wound or a hoof nail 'prick' or a 'close' nail when being shod. Otherwise, a booster needle of tetanus toxoid should be given every 1-2 years for competition horses and at least every 5 years for grazing horses. For horses which sustain wounds or deep bruising, and have been previously vaccinated, a booster injection of the tetanus toxoid will help optimise full immunity within 48-72 hours. Following a severe wound or a hoof nail 'prick', a subcutaneous (under the skin) injection of Tetanus Antibody Serum should also be given to a horse which has not been vaccinated prior to or at the time of injury, to provide temporary protection (instant immunity) for around 3 weeks. They should be given a full course of tetanus toxoid vaccination as well. Consult your vet for specific advice relative to the severity of the injury and the risk of tetanus in your horse.

The initial vaccination for strangles should be injected intramuscularly (IM) 3 times, 2 weeks apart, and then follow-up boosters should be given every 6-12 months. Consult your vet for advice, especially if an outbreak of strangles occurs in horses in your area.

Handy Hint 8 Keep a Health Care Diary

It is very useful to keep a diary on the dates of worming and wormer used (so that you know when it's time to rotate to a different compound), next worming date due, hoof trim or shoeing time, dates of teeth rasping and dental care, as well as vaccination dates and booster reminders. Some horse owners hang a calendar in the feed shed (or even on the back of the toilet door to remind them each day), or in a dedicated health care diary on their computer or in a daily diary book. Computers can be programmed to activate reminder dates for follow-up health care (eg the free One Note Program™)

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