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VACCINATION FOR HORSES

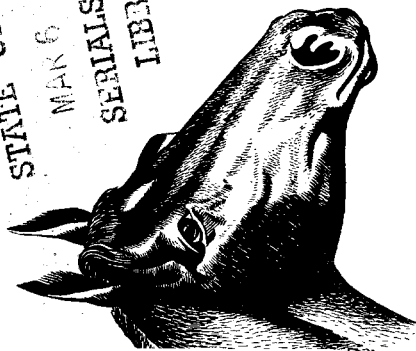
Ivan E. Berg, D.V.M.
Asst. Prof. Veterinary Science

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VACCINATION FOR HORSES

A horse of any value at all should be vaccinated for tetanus and sleeping sickness, since these diseases are so serious and so easily contracted. Immunization against influenza and strangles is important if you do a lot of traveling with your horse. Vaccination against the other diseases mentioned depends on the individual situation. In general, young horses, particularly foals and yearlings, are the most susceptible to disease. Older animals may become infected if they have not been previously exposed or if their resistance has decreased over a period of years. Stress factors such as fatigue, shipping and concurrent virus infections tend to lower a horse's resistance to disease and make him more susceptible.

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Disease prevention through vaccination is a wise investment but should not be used as a substitute for good management and sanitation. The best results will be obtained by working with your veterinarian in setting up a regular vaccination schedule. A "hit or miss" program will not give your horse the protection you desire. A regular schedule is especially important if you show, race, or compete anywhere that groups of horses are congregated.

In recent years, several new vaccines for horses have been developed. The diseases in question have been with us for some time. Now there is finally a means of protecting horses against them. Vaccines for sleeping sickness and tetanus are not new, but even these are available now in a more refined form.

The diseases of horses for which a vaccine is available are:

(1) **EQUINE INFLUENZA:** "horse flu," "2 year old cough." This is a virus disease which is not highly fatal but results in a serious setback for the horse. Pneumonia may complicate the disease and make the problem much more severe. The vaccine is given in two doses, 6 to 12 weeks apart, the first year. A booster should be given annually thereafter.

(2) **EQUINE ENCEPHALOMYELITIS:** "sleeping sickness." This is a virus disease spread mainly by mosquitoes. Most people are familiar with it. It is a very serious disease with a high death rate. The vaccine must be given in two doses yearly. The doses are usually separated by a 7 to 10 day interval. This should be started in February or March to assure a good level of protection before the insect season begins.

(3) **STRANGLES:** "distemper"

This is a bacterial disease of horses. Recovery is the rule rather than the exception, especially with good treatment and nursing, but severe complications are not uncommon. Ugly scars may result from rupture of abscesses in the throat and jaw regions. The first year, three doses of the bacterin are given at 7 day intervals. One dose yearly is then recommended.

(4) **TETANUS:** "lockjaw"

This is a bacterial disease which is actually a toxemia rather than an infection. The tetanus organism gains entry through wounds. Puncture wounds are especially dangerous. The disease,

if symptoms are noted, is almost invariably fatal. Horses should be given two injections of the toxoid the first year, spaced 4 to 8 weeks apart. One booster dose is then given yearly.

(5) VIRAL RHINOPNEUMONITIS: "contagious abortion." This is a virus disease. The virus is similar to that which causes the common cold in humans. Young horses will have an upper respiratory infection which is not extremely serious unless bacterial invasion occurs. Pregnant mares may abort. The vaccine is a live virus preparation which is sprayed into the horse's nostrils. The idea is to induce the infection and give a temporary immunity to the horse at a time when he is most likely to become naturally infected. The vaccine is usually administered in July and October of each year.

(6) RABIES: This disease is not a big problem in horses but occasionally they are vaccinated, especially in areas where rabies is prevalent. It is important to use a killed virus vaccine and not the modified live virus that is usually used in dogs.

(7) MIXED INFECTIONS: Horses are subject to many bacterial infections which may affect various organs or systems of the body. Streptococcal or staphylococcal organisms may infect a mare's reproductive organs so that she fails to conceive. These same organisms may produce mastitis in the mare or navel ill and joint infection in foals. A bacteria called Escherichia coli is capable of producing fatal diarrhea in foals. The pasteurella organism may cause severe pneumonia in horses of any age. There is a mixed bacterin produced which includes all of these organisms in one product. It is given in two doses per year at 7 to 10 day intervals.
