



Basic Horse Care: Preventive Health Care

“The horse, with beauty unsurpassed, strength immeasurable and grace unlike any other, still remains humble enough to carry a man upon his back.” ~Amber Senti

Did You Know? A large portion of horse owners today are women over 50 who have college degrees and have owned horses for 20 years or more. (AAEP 2012 survey)

Horse owners of any age or experience level should engage the services of both a licensed equine veterinarian and a qualified farrier. Horses need veterinary care for health problems as they arise, but like all animals, they also need preventive health care. A preventive health care program should be designed to meet the specific needs of the horse and should be appropriate to the age of the horse as well as the facilities and environment in which that horse lives.

Horses should be observed by the owner or those caring for the horse at least once a day or more often during high-risk periods such as seasonal changes, introduction of new animals, or near foaling time. Get to know what is normal for your horse, including pulse, respiration, and general demeanor, so you can tell when something is not normal for your horse.

Increased horse population density (whether on the farm or when traveling) requires greater attention to disease prevention. The types of vaccinations used and the frequency of vaccination should be determined by a veterinarian. Vaccinations are administered at least annually, and sometimes they are needed more frequently depending on the risk of exposure to infectious diseases.

Horses are exposed to parasites in their environment on a regular basis, so deworming protocols will involve administration of anthelmintics as determined by the veterinarian. Manure and pasture management to help reduce the level of exposure is also important. The Equine Disease Communication Center (www.equinediseasecc.org) is a great resource to learn about infectious diseases and get alerts.

All horses require routine hoof care. This can range from simply trimming the hooves to complex corrective shoeing procedures. All horses require some type of hoof care at least every two to three months throughout the year, and more frequently if they are shod, in order to maintain the health of the foot. The frequency of required hoof care will depend on such factors as age, season, nutrition, environment, management, and injury. A farrier will normally be employed to do this work.

Another critical health care area is a horse's teeth and oral cavity. Your horse's teeth should be examined at least annually. Dental problems should be addressed quickly as they can interfere with normal eating and can adversely affect the overall health of the horse. Dental care should be performed by a licensed veterinarian or under veterinary supervision.

Of course, the best preventive care doesn't always keep horses healthy and safe. Accidents do happen. Learn how to recognize problems and consider learning basic first aid so you can help your horse until your veterinarian arrives. There are many great resources that list the essentials of a first aid kit. Just remember, keep one at the barn and one in your trailer for when you are on the road!