



Ensuring Good Health for Your Horse

By Dr. Mark Baus, DVM

Developing and maintaining a wellness program for your horse will help him maintain health and vitality for years to come.

Your horse's health and fitness are important not only for optimum performance in the show ring but are also essential for day-to-day vitality and a long, healthy life. Central to maintaining long-term health in your horse is the wellness program structured with your veterinarian's help. A typical wellness program usually involves the following activities:

- ◆ Yearly physical examination
- ◆ Vaccinations
- ◆ Parasite control
- ◆ Dentistry
- ◆ Nutritional counseling

Yearly physical examination

The yearly physical or wellness examination allows your veterinarian to identify health issues before they become serious. The examination pro-



SARAH HOPE

Caroline Weeden rides Croquet in a hunter derby class. Maintaining your horse's health and fitness will help ensure his longevity and vitality—as well as optimum performance in the show ring.

cess also allows you to address concerns and ask questions about your horse's health that have accumulated over the past year.

Vaccinations

Vaccination requirements are different for each part of the country and are also dependent on travel and horse show schedules. For horses that are actively showing, inoculation for equine influenza and equine herpes virus (flu & rhino) are essential. The frequency of this inoculation should be carefully determined with your veterinarian to provide your horse with optimum protection and to meet the needs of the horse show facilities you will be visiting. Most horses in the United States will require inoculation for West Nile virus, Eastern & Western encephalitis and tetanus at least once yearly. Rabies inoculation, although not required in all parts of the country, is performed not only for the horse's protection but for public health concerns. The need for Potomac horse fever, botulism and strangles inoculations will depend on the specific needs of your region and where you go throughout the year.

Parasite control

The parasite control program that you choose is vital to your horse's well-being. With your veterinarian's help, you can choose either an intermittent deworming program using a variety of paste dewormers at regular intervals or a daily deworming program supplemented by paste deworming two to four times yearly. Many factors will determine the best program for keeping your horse protected from parasites. Among these factors include yearly rainfall (a wet, lush environment requires a more aggressive parasite program) and the concentration of horses on the property they reside.

Dentistry

Dental care for your horse is beneficial for two reasons. As enamel points de-

velop on the molar teeth, the ability to properly grind food intake is compromised. These enamel points will cause injury to the lining of the cheeks as well as the tongue, which makes chewing painful and less efficient. The second reason for regular dental care is the performance aspect. In order for your horse to properly accept the bit and respond appropriately to rider input, the teeth must be maintained by a once- or twice-yearly procedure known as floating. Your veterinarian can advise you on the best interval to float your horse's teeth and who should perform this procedure.

Nutritional counseling

As an athlete, your horse has extremely important nutritional needs. In addition to determining the proper weight for your horse, the proper blend of feed intake is important. The days of "hay, oats and water" are long gone. Hay is still an important part of any horse's diet, but the type and amount of hay is critical. There are many grain-based formulations that help round out your horse's nutritional needs. Determining the best blend of hay, grain and nutritional supplements will undoubtedly necessitate expert advice from your veterinarian or even a nutritional expert with a strong background in equine requirements.

Although their accuracy is questionable, the regular use of a weight tape can help track changes in your horse's weight. Although health problems can occur at any time, careful attention to these five areas will go a long way in preventing many illnesses and will ensure top performance from our equine athletes.

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