



Think Twice Before Vaccinating a Horse Yourself: Playing Veterinarian May Not be Worth the Risk

Let's face it, horse ownership can be expensive! So it's no surprise that horse owners everywhere are looking for ways to pinch pennies. But not using a veterinarian to administer vaccines is not the place to cut back. Megan Green, DVM, manager, Equine and Large Animal Veterinary Services, Merial, explains the reasons why.

"Vaccinations are part of a comprehensive equine health care plan, and help protect horses against such debilitating and life-threatening diseases as rabies, West Nile virus, Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis and Western Equine Encephalomyelitis, Equine Herpes Virus, Equine Influenza and Potomac Horse Fever. When your veterinarian comes to give some or all of these vaccinations in the spring and fall, he or she is also examining the horse and providing an overall health assessment," Green says. "This thorough examination will help identify any health issues the horse might have that an owner has not been trained to detect."

Another reason to use a veterinarian to give vaccinations is that while the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) issues recommendations for core and non-core vaccinations, a veterinarian is the best source to determine which of the non-core vaccinations are necessary based upon the horse, its particular use and threats that might be specific to the region.

Veterinarians are also carefully trained in the proper handling of vaccines in order to preserve their safety and efficacy. Vaccines that have not been stored at the right temperature, are not given in the correct location or in the proper dosage may not work at all. Veterinarians are trained to understand and manage all these variables.

Another important factor to consider, according to Green, is the possibility of adverse events. "Vaccines are designed to stimulate an immune response and not all horses will respond the same. While adverse events following vaccinations are

typically rare, veterinarians are trained to manage them. Many horse owners might not be able to quickly identify whether a reaction was serious or normal, or be able to treat a horse experiencing an adverse reaction.”

Most manufacturers do not support the administration of vaccines by anyone other than a qualified veterinarian and label their products accordingly. Should an adverse event occur, the manufacturer would not likely accept any liability due to the product being used “off-label.”

“Horse owners invest a lot of time and resources into their horses and want the best for them, which should include having a veterinarian give vaccinations,” Green says. “The amount of money that can be saved isn’t worth risking the horse’s health.

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