

Vaccination considerations for my donkey

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When designing a vaccination schedule for your farm, it is important to take in to account some important issues. First, what diseases are prevalent in your area of the country? If the disease is not prevalent, you may not need to vaccinate. It is not only an issue of cost, but also potential side effects of the vaccine or injection.

Remember that every medication has potential side effects! Never use a product unless the benefits outweigh the risks of an adverse reaction! Also, consider the severity of the disease: is it fatal or does it just limit the use of the donkey for a period of time, such as Strangles? Most of our donkeys are more of a companion to us or other equids and “down-time” is not as critical as it would be for a racing individual. Another concern is the disease a problem – year round or seasonal? If the disease is seasonal, how long is the immunity provided by the vaccine? This will determine the optimum time of year to vaccinate, thus providing maximal protection during the high-risk times of the year. Eastern and Western Encephalomyelitis (EEE and WEE) are good examples of a seasonal disease with a vaccine that doesn't provide good protection for a full year. There are certain vaccines that all equids require regardless of where you live in N. America. EEE, WEE, WNV (West Nile Encephalomyelitis), and Tetanus are the ones that kill and occur regardless of where you equid lives. Rabies is another disease that may be on the definitely do list in certain parts of the country. A final consideration is economics. If the vaccine is expensive, isn't routinely fatal, has side effects, and my animal is at a low risk of contracting the disease, vaccination may not be warranted.

In general, an initial series of injections is required when dealing with an individual with no or unknown vaccination history. This could be a foal that is just starting its vaccinations or a recently purchased horse of unknown vaccination history. If the foal received adequate colostrums, foal vaccinations are usually started at about 5 – 6 months of age; however, if the foal was a failure of passive transfer, vaccinations should start in the second to third month of life. Vaccinations of a horse of unknown status may be started immediately. A booster is required approximately one month after the initial injection. After the booster, a routine schedule is followed, depending upon the specific vaccine administered (see Table). Although a number of the vaccinations can be combined into one injection, the number of injections given may become excessive if many or all the above vaccinations are given to one horse. To minimize the discomfort and possibility of the horse experiencing a very severe reaction, the number of injections given at one time should be limited to two or three. If more injections need to be given, wait a week and administer the remaining injections.

The majority of injections are given intramuscularly, however not all. **Read the directions for use carefully!** To reduce the risk of an injection reaction, proper injection sites should be used. If you are administering injections to your equid, be

familiar with these sites. The most commonly used sites are the neck, the butt (gluteal muscles), and the hindquarters (semi-membranosis/tendinosis). **Never use the neck in a nursing foal!** If the neck becomes sore, the foal may refuse to nurse. If you have questions about the proper techniques involved in giving intramuscular injections, consult your veterinarian.

There are several sources of vaccines (your veterinarian, feed or tack stores, catalogs, etc.), but the only vaccines supported by the manufacturers are those that are administered or supervised by your veterinarian. Therefore, both the design and source of your farm's vaccination program should be determined through consultation with your veterinarian.

Also, remember that vaccination is but one component of a complete health care program for your horse or farm. Vaccinating your horse for every thing, but neglecting the deworming program, diet, or environment of the horse is counter-productive. Consult with your veterinarian to develop a complete program for your farm.