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MANAGING DURING DROUGHT

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By Doug Thal, DVM, DABVP

Several areas of the country are currently experiencing drought. Abnormally dry conditions pose unique health care and management challenges for horse owners.

Pasture

Horses on productive pastures tend to exercise naturally as they graze; this constant moving and foraging is beneficial for their digestive health. When green pasture dwindles, however, horses tend to exercise less and instead wait in the shade for feeding time. These horses are more inclined to have gastrointestinal problems that can lead to colic. Thus, under these conditions I recommend feeding horses a generous amount of a bland (such as longstem) grass hay to keep them eating and occupied during the day. This is preferable to having them wait around for an occasional rich feeding. When moisture finally returns, it is important to moderate horses' access to rapidly changing pasture, so their systems can re-adjust to green grass.

Hay

Drought conditions also reduce hay supplies, making it difficult for owners to maintain consistent hay diets for their horses. Radically changing feed types increase a horse's risk for health problems, especially colic. If you can't maintain a consistent hay type, source, and quality, gradually reduce the amount of the old batch you feed, mixing it with an increasing amount of the new hay (over three to five days) to ease the transition. When purchasing hay from a new source, always examine it carefully for mold, dust, weeds, blister beetles, and sharp seed awns. While feed concentrates can supplement horses' diets in some cases, they should not replace hay (high fiber or roughage feeds). Hay should be the staple of the equine diet.

Toxic Plants

Horses with adequate forage usually avoid eating toxic weeds. During drought conditions, however, when weeds might be the only green plants on pasture, horses are more likely to eat them. The best way to prevent this is to provide more consistent access to good-quality hay. Talk to your vet or local equine extension agent about the toxic plants in your area. You should learn to recognize these and, if possible, remove them from pastures.

Sand Colic

Horses tend to ingest more dirt and sand when pastured in drought conditions as they try to graze the last few short shoots and roots. Sand accumulation in the gut is a serious problem that can lead to colic and diarrhea. Reduce sand ingestion by feeding off the ground or feeding in sand-free areas of the pasture. This sometimes requires more than simply using a feeder, as hay usually still falls on the ground and is picked out of the soil. Consider placing rubber mats under feeders or feeding in stalls without sandy floors. Feeding a psyllium product regularly (usually one week per month) can (cont. on pg. 4)

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What to Expect When Your Horse is Vaccinated

PROTECT YOUR HORSE from Infection

Vaccination is one of the best and most cost-effective ways to prevent many infectious diseases in your horse. Your veterinarian is an expert when it comes to the health of your horse. He/She can help you perform a risk-based evaluation to determine what vaccines are right for your horse with regard to potential risk factors.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) recommends all horses to be vaccinated against West Nile virus, Eastern and Western sleeping sickness, tetanus and rabies. These are known as “core vaccines.” And if your horse is co-mingled with other horses, vaccines such as influenza, herpes or strangles may be warranted. These are known as “risk bases” vaccines. While there is a cost associated with vaccination, preventive care is much more cost effective than treatment of a disease. Your veterinarian can discuss with you the best vaccination protocol for your horse.

Not only are vaccines effective, but they are also quite safe. Years of research and development occur prior to the vaccine being tested in large number of horses in an effort to satisfy USDA requirements. However, occasionally a vaccine may not protect your horse for a variety of reasons:

- Compromised immune system (stress)
- Exposure to disease prior to vaccination
- Overwhelming challenge by infectious agent
- Improper handling and storage of the vaccine

Because every horse is unique, your veterinarian will perform an examination prior to vaccination to be sure it is healthy. Their knowledge of the proper methods to handle and store vaccines reduces the potential for a vaccine to be ineffective.

TYPES OF vaccines

Horse owners sometimes wonder if their horse can contract the disease from the vaccines. There are primarily two types of equine vaccines— modified live and inactivated. The majority of equine vaccines are inactivated, meaning the disease-causing microbes have been killed prior to making the vaccine. Once killed, these microbes cannot revert back to their disease-causing state making it impossible for the vaccine to cause the disease in the horse after vaccination.

VACCINE reactions

Since vaccines stimulate an immune response, it is not uncommon for horses to experience mild and transient side effects shortly after vaccination similar to what you might expect after human vaccination. These may include:

- Low grade fever (<102° F)
- Decreased appetite
- Fatigue or decreased energy
- Injection-site tenderness

These signs should dissipate within approximately 24 hours following vaccination. If they do not, a consultation with your veterinarian may be warranted.

Your veterinarian should be contacted immediately if signs of hives, difficulty breathing, or colic develop soon after vaccination, as these indicate a more serious vaccine reaction.

Vaccine manufacturers utilize various processes to filter the vaccine during the manufacturing process. Ultrafil™ Purification Technology, utilized in the Vetera® vaccines, is a unique filtration process that eliminates most of the extraneous (or unnecessary) proteins and/or cellular debris from the vaccine, helping minimize reactions.

To minimize vaccination reactions, allow your veterinarian to administer the vaccine. They know the medical history of your horse, proper vaccine handling and administration techniques.

AFTER vaccination

To make your horse more comfortable after vaccination:

- Walk or allow free-choice exercise for approximately 20-30 minutes following vaccination. This increases blood flow to the muscles helping reduce stiffness.
- Minimize strenuous activities for 2-3 days following vaccination. This allows time for a good immune response, as well as dissipation of any “normal” post-vaccination responses.
- If mild injection site tenderness occurs, topical hydro- or cold therapy will help.
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories may be warranted to make your horse more comfortable. Contact your veterinarian prior to administering any medication following vaccination.



Making Appointments

When scheduling appointments with any of the doctors the following information would be very helpful:

- 1 Name of horse's owner
(Address and phone number if new client or the address has changed.)
- 2 Name of horse(s).
Address or location of the horse.
- 3 Issues involved such as vaccinations, lameness, illness, etc.
- 4 Contact person (if different from owner) and phone number.
Problems do arise during the day such as emergencies, extra work at a prior call, necessitating change of appointment time.
Sometimes the doctor may actually be early.
- 5 Payment is due at time of service. Cash, check, or credit card is accepted.

** We will make every effort to provide the best service and care to maintain the health and well being of your horse(s). Your help providing the above information will go a long way to accomplish this goal.

AAEP Foundation Funds Efforts to Aid Horses Affected by Severe Weather

May 27, 2011

The Foundation offers support through its Emergency Relief Fund; Additional Funding is needed

Relief organizations responding to equine emergencies in the aftermath of a series of destructive storms this spring are eligible for funding from the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) Foundation. In addition, the Foundation welcomes donations for its Equine Disaster Relief Fund to help accommodate the potential needs of equine and veterinary communities impacted by recent storms and natural disasters.

As part of its mission to improve the welfare of horses, the AAEP Foundation accepts year-round funding requests to assist organizations responding to disasters and emergencies affecting the equine community. Organizations working to help horses in areas devastated by recent severe weather or other natural disasters can apply for funding from the Foundation's Emergency Relief Fund at www.aaep.org/disaster_reliefund.htm.

After Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast in 2005, the AAEP Foundation formed an Emergency Relief Fund to aid horses in the event of a natural disaster. Since the fund was established, the AAEP Foundation has donated emergency funds to support the Mounted Division of the New Orleans Police Department, the Louisiana State Veterinary Medical Association's Equine Committee Foundation, the Mississippi State Veterinary Medical Association's Animal Disaster Relief Fund, hay and feed programs in the gulf region, and support for emergency preparedness programs at the University of Florida and Texas A&M Colleges of Veterinary Medicine, among others.

The AAEP Foundation is currently accepting donations for its Equine Disaster Relief Fund. To make a donation, visit the AAEP Foundation Web site at www.aaepfoundation.org.

The AAEP Foundation, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization, was created in 1994 as the charitable arm of the American Association of Equine Practitioners. The AAEP Foundation's mission is to improve the health and welfare of the horse through support of research, education, benevolence and the equine community. Since its inception, the Foundation has allocated more than \$1.8 million to support its mission.



Managing During Drought (cont'd from pg. 1)

also be beneficial, but it should complement these other management practices— don't rely on it alone. Also, rotate pastures to avoid overgrazing and to help keep drought-stressed grasses alive. This will preserve some ground cover, thus reducing wind and water erosion and soil loss later.

Water

A pond or stream that pastured horses use as a water source might dwindle or become stagnant in drought conditions. Monitor water quality in these situations and provide extra fresh water. If horses are housed in large groups, offer plenty of room for watering and feeding because injuries can occur as horses compete for limited watering and feeding areas.

Wind

Also take into account wind; blowing dust can irritate eyes and cause respiratory problems. Fly masks provide protection from insects and some can also help protect from intense sunlight and dust. Adequate shelter and clean bedding can also help horses avoid airborne dust.

Disease

Certain diseases such as pigeon fever (dryland distemper), vesicular stomatitis, and *Rhodococcus equi* pneumonia in foals can be more common in dry, hot, and dusty conditions. Know these diseases' clinical signs so you can contact your vet immediately if you see signs develop.

Wildfire

Drought also has led to wildfire risks in many areas, especially heavily wooded regions. Horse owners who live in fire-prone areas should prepare for wildfires by having evacuation plans. All horse owners should have (or have easy access to) a serviceable truck and trailer they can use quickly in an emergency. Work with your veterinarian and be aware of drought-related problems to help maintain your horse's health and welfare during this potentially stressful time.

AAEP Forum article courtesy of [The Horse](#) magazine, an AAEP Media Partner.

In This Issue...

Managing Drought, Vaccinations, AAEP Foundations, New Associate joins practice



Crystal DeWitt, DVM

Crystal received her DVM from Michigan State and graduated with Honors in 2011. Her undergraduate degree (B.S.) is from the University of Findlay where she majored in Equestrian Science.

She is an active cutting horse enthusiast and a member of the Great Lakes Cutting Horse Association (GLCA). Crystal is a past president of the GLCA. Between Findlay and MSU she worked as an assistant trainer for a cutting horse farm in southeast Michigan. She lives in Dryden with her husband Chad, three cats, two dogs and five horses. Her special interest includes lameness diagnosis, dentistry and reproduction.

