



# TO THE PEN

SEVENTH EDITION

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MAY 8, 2010

## Welcome to the Okotoks Ag Society Penning Series

MAY 8, 22, 23 & JUNE 5

### Prizes

**High Point Rider bronzes** for the Open, Ltd. Open, Ten, Seven & Five Classes

**Summer weight blankets** for High Point Teams in the Open, Ten, Seven, & Five classes, & **headstalls** for the high point rider in the Senior & Junior Youth classes.

## THE BEST DEFENCE

*Horses on the show circuit might be exposed to dozens of different equine diseases every weekend. Is your horse's vaccination schedule all it should be?*

Some horses lead sheltered lives, whiling away their days in isolated pastures and back-country trails, rarely encountering another equine soul save for the same small group of pasture buddies they've had for years.

Your horse, is more than likely not one of these. As an owner interested in competitive riding, you know that your horses recognize the familiar interior of your trailer. They know about the sounds of the highway, and the chaos and energy of

showgrounds, of horses and people milling around from early morning till late at night, of loudspeakers blaring, and the smell of nachos and curly fries. In short, they're seasoned (or green) show horses, and as such they're exposed to a different population of other horses every weekend they travel.

Though show horses are, on the whole, healthy and well-cared for, there are risks involved anytime large numbers

of previously unacquainted animals are put together in a single area. And no, I'm not talking about squashed toes or inadvertent collisions in the warm-up ring. I'm talking about the risk of spreading disease. So before you load your horse into that trailer ask yourself: Is he adequately protected?

Twenty-first-century horses are fortunate indeed to have available the wide array of vaccines which help protect them from deadly diseases.

### T2097 2010 Sooner Legacy SES 318 3 horse gooseneck

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But vaccines can't work unless they're administered far enough in advance to allow the immune system to process their chemical message and "learn" to recognize the antigens which cause disease, before your horse is exposed to other, potentially infectious, animals. That's why it's important to work closely with your veterinarian to design a vaccination schedule that will provide the right protection, at the right time, for the diseases to which your horse is most likely to be exposed.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR A VACCINATION SCHEDULE**

Vaccinations protect your horse against life threatening diseases such as tetanus, and diseases that can severely affect its health and performance, such as equine influenza (flu) and herpes virus infection.

Vaccination is the only proven method of protecting against these diseases: there is no specific cure for them and treatment may be not only unsuccessful but extremely expensive.

The organism which causes tetanus, Clostridium tetani, lives in the soil, and is rife in some areas. It enters tissues through wounds, and horses are particularly susceptible. If a horse has not been immunised, it is likely to need a shot of tetanus antitoxin for even minor wounds or when it undergoes a surgical procedure. The organism thrives without oxygen: it can enter a small puncture wound, such as a nail or thorn prick, which may well go unnoticed. Even when antitoxin is given, the often fatal disease can take hold. Only vaccination provides long term protection against this happening.

As well, most horses traveling to shows should be protected against Eastern and/or Western equine encephalomyelitis (EEE and WEE). The incidence of these diseases varies from year to year, so if you're planning to show only locally and your veterinarian feels the risk is

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low, you may decide to skip this vaccine ... but if you're going to be shipping any distance, you should consider it cheap insurance.

One of the biggest risks for horses being kept in close proximity with each other is respiratory viruses. Equine herpes virus (formerly known as rhinopneumonitis, or "rhino", now more commonly abbreviated as EHV), influenza, and strangles aren't usually fatal, but they can definitely put a major crimp in your show season! Any kind of respiratory disease can make your horse feverish, depressed, weak, and snotty-nosed for weeks - and they tend to be highly contagious.

The trouble is that the vaccines available to protect against these diseases for the past 20 years or so have checkered track records, to say the least. Very often, they deliver only partial immunity, and the duration of that protection is measured in days or weeks instead of months. Says Henderson, "Unfortunately, the immunity provided by the intramuscular vaccines for influenza and EHV is short-lived. It is recommended that horses in contact with groups of other horses at racetracks or horse shows be vaccinated at least every 90 days."

Furthermore, the intramuscular flu/rhino combination vaccine relied on by thousands of horsepeople has been shown not to be effective in protecting "naïve" horses (those who had never been previously exposed) from influenza or EHV, according to Paton.

The good news is that a new form of vaccine, delivered as an intranasal spray, is now making more complete protection possible against both influenza and strangles. The IN format vaccines appear to provide superior immunity because they stimulate the respiratory system's immune response more directly than an intramuscular shot.

**NEW CONCERNS**

The West Nile virus, which until 1999 had been confined to Europe and Africa, but which made its way across the ocean and then spread across North America with alarming speed in the beginning of the 21st century.

Only geriatric and very weak horses are really at risk of dying from WNV, but the disease is quite debilitating even for young, robust animals, so researchers bowed to demand and came up with a vaccine formulation in record time. There are now a number of very effective West Nile vaccines available, and they're worth considering

**WHEN TO ADMINISTER?**

To design the most effective vaccination program for your show horses, work closely with your veterinarian. Ideally, your horse should receive his vaccines at least three weeks prior to his first exposure to populations of other horses, in order to give his immune system time to process the antigens and form disease antibodies.

Bear in mind that some vaccines provide immunity for a year or longer, while others are fairly short-acting and will need to be re-administered at some point during your show season. Establishing good communication with your vet about your show schedule and exposure risk is the best way to ensure your horse stays protected.

**AND REMEMBER ANOTHER GOOD PRACTICE IS TO NOT SHARE WATER BUCKETS!**



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