



Vaccination Schedule for Colorado Equines

We get a lot of questions here at Mobile Veterinary Services, LLC regarding vaccinations. When to do them, why we give them, and exactly what they are and how they benefit our horses. So we will attempt to answer all these questions here.

Vaccinations prevent disease by helping the body to build immunity to the particular disease the vaccination is given for. A vaccine usually contains a modified or dead disease germ that builds the body's defense system by causing it to create antibodies that fight that particular disease. These antibodies stick around, so when the actual germ shows up, your body knows how to defend itself against that germ and fight it off. Most equine vaccines require regular boosters to stay active. The boosters act as a reminder to your body on how to fight off the disease.

The AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) and the AAEP (American Association of Equine Practitioners) recommend a series of core vaccines be given to all horses. A core vaccine is one that "protects from diseases that are endemic to a region, those with potential public health significance, required by law, virulent/ highly infectious, and/ or posing a risk of severe disease. Core vaccines have clearly demonstrated efficacy and safety, and thus exhibit a high enough level of patient benefit and low enough level of risk to justify their use in the majority of patients." Simply stated, it's safe, effective, and protects your horse and potentially humans. Spring and fall are the two times of year that most horses are given vaccine boosters.

SPRING: The vaccinations given here in Colorado in the spring are usually focused at a couple of targeted disease areas- insect borne and communicable.

The insect borne diseases are Eastern Equine Encephalitis, Western Equine Encephalitis, and West Nile Virus. Even though we live in a dry, mountainous and high plains region here in Colorado, we do have a very distinct "mosquito" season, as any of you who spend any time outside on a spring or summer evening can probably attest to. These insect-borne diseases show up on a regular basis in the un-vaccinated equine population - particularly West Nile. Remember that your horses spend most or all their time out of doors, so imagine how many bites they can get in a single day.

Though it can vary from year to year, we usually start seeing mosquitoes in May, so from a timing standpoint, April is the ideal time to vaccinate in order to have full protection a couple of weeks later when the mosquitoes start to show up. All of the vaccines for these Encephalitis' are labeled for a full year of protection, so there is no need to booster until the following spring.

The second group of vaccines that are part of the spring vaccine combination address communicable diseases. For us in Colorado that includes Rhino (EHV1 and EHV 4) and influenza. EHV-1 has been in the news a lot lately, with a number of outbreaks across the United States, including several here in Colorado. These diseases are passed from horse to horse, either by aerosol or direct contact. So it's critical that as you start getting out and hitting the show circuit, or the trail, you make sure your equine partners are fully vaccinated, and watch who they comingle with.

There is one more vaccine that we recommend you give in the spring that is neither a communicable nor an insect borne, but is absolutely a core vaccine. That is Tetanus. Horses are extremely sensitive to tetanus, and thus should be boosted annually. In addition, if they have a wound 6 months or more after their last booster, we may want them to be re-boostered. Tetanus is a very severe disease that fortunately is also very preventable with an appropriate vaccination schedule.



Quick Reference Vaccination Schedule

- Spring Core Vaccines: Eastern and Western Equine Encephalitis, West Nile Virus, Rhino (EHV1 & EHV4), and Tetanus
- Fall Core Vaccines: Rhino/Flu and Rabies
- Remember that having your horse checked by a veterinarian at least once a year can actually help save money by catching problems early



Horses grazing in mountain pasture.

Photo Courtesy mathias-erhart on flickr

“Core vaccines are safe, effective, and protect your horse and potentially humans. They are a key part of keeping your horse as healthy and active as possible.”

FALL: The vaccinations that we recommend for fall are Rhino/ Flu, and Rabies. Rhino/Flu is given at least twice per year due to the highly contagious nature of the diseases, and the fact that the vaccinations are only protective for 4-6 months. For those horses that travel and show frequently, vaccination for Rhino/Flu every 3-4 would be recommended. Like a human flu (influenza) vaccine, the equine flu vaccine doesn't protect against every strain, but offers a significant protection against this disease.

Rabies, while being relatively uncommon in horses, is absolutely a core vaccine. Here in Colorado we've been seeing more cases of horses contracting rabies, including two recent equine deaths from rabies in Weld County in the spring of 2013, and another equine case in Logan County. Rabies is 100% fatal for all mammals once clinical signs are shown, and poses a significant risk to humans. Particularly since rabies doesn't necessarily present symptoms that are familiar to horse owners. By the time rabies has been diagnosed, an entire family, veterinarians and staff, and possibly friends or other boarders at a stable will all have been exposed to this deadly disease. Rabies vaccinations are critical, and in Colorado, the State Department of Public Health only considers your horse to be properly vaccinated if the rabies vaccine was administered by a licensed veterinarian.

Vaccinations are a key part of keeping your horse as healthy and active as possible. If you have any questions about vaccination schedules, or to schedule an appointment, please contact Mobile Veterinary Services at 303-279-4893, or visit our website at www.mvsequine.com.

Mobile Veterinary Services, LLC

5551 Indiana St.
Golden, CO 80403
303-279-4853
www.mvsequine.com

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Whether you're brand new to horse ownership or old hands, we're your partner in horse care. Call us today at 303-279-4893 to set up an appointment, or click on our services to see how we can help you.