

Hey Neighbor

For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Sleeping Sickness Shot Available With West Nile Vaccine

Horsemen in general are diligent in vaccinating their horses annually for sleeping sickness.

It is a practice that should be continued, according to veterinarians.

"Most of our clients have their horses on an annual sleeping sickness vaccination program, which is usually administered with a tetanus booster to prevent lockjaw," said Dr. Nicole Porter, Blue Rapids veterinarian.

West Nile virus, which has received considerable news coverage in recent years due to causing deaths of horses and humans, is also a form of equine encephalitis, the technical name for sleeping sickness.

"However, West Nile is an entirely different virus, so the sleeping sickness vaccine given in the past will not control West Nile," emphasized Dr. Lee Penner, Manhattan veterinarian.

"This year for the first time, a combination vaccine is available which can be used for controlling Eastern and Western encephalitis and tetanus as well as West Nile," Porter said.

Many of her clients have opted to give the new combination shot. "It's always easier to give just one vaccination, instead of several if it's possible," Porter noted.

While the cost of vaccinating to prevent West Nile was highly variable when the virus first struck, costs have leveled off, and the vaccine is now readily available through veterinarians, Porter said.

Costs vary, but it's around \$6 to \$7 for a typical sleeping sickness and tetanus vaccine. A West Nile vaccination alone

would be in the \$12 to \$15 range. A combination vaccination would cost about \$19 to \$20, Porter tallied.

The veterinarians acknowledged that sometimes horse owners with large numbers of animals have considered this expensive. However, it was emphasized that the cost would be quite small compared to the death of a horse or even a veterinarian's bill for treating an ill horse.

"Sleeping sickness vaccinations should be given in March before the mosquito season begins," Penner recommended.

However, it's still not too late, and vaccinations can be administered at any time. "Horses initially require two vaccinations 3-6 weeks apart, and then need an annual booster," Porter said.

Sleeping sickness is not a communicable disease, according to Dr. Sam Graham, state veterinarian, but the viruses are spread by mosquitoes. "They can not spread from horse to horse," he said.

Although, sleeping sickness has not been a major problem in horses for over 25 years ago, Graham said the Venezuelan strain is more severe. If a case of it would be reported, the Kansas Animal Health Department would become regulatory, because this virus is foreign to the United States.

"Horses that are on a regular vaccination program do develop an immunity. This is part of the situation with fewer West Nile cases than in the past, but an annual booster is still necessary," Penner added.

"The Eastern and Venezuelan strains of encephalitis are

generally more severe than the Western, and have a higher mortality rate," stated Dr. Don Evans of the USDA Vet Service in Topeka.

"We always get reports of Eastern encephalitis along the eastern seaboard. The Western virus is still around, even though I haven't heard of recent cases," commented Dr. Eileen Ostlund at the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa.

According to veterinarians, an affected animal will act uncoordinated or severely depressed and will appear to fall asleep. As the disease progresses, the horse may lean on things, go down, or be too weak to get back up.

The animal may be unable to swallow, sometimes will constantly circle and may exhibit blindness.

"Mortality rates differ with various strains of the virus. An affected animal may die, while in other cases may recover," commented Ostlund.

From 20 to 40 percent of horses that become ill with West Nile or the Western strain will die. Death rate for the Eastern and Venezuelan strains is up to 80 to 90 percent.

In those that recover, the possibility of permanent damage is always there.

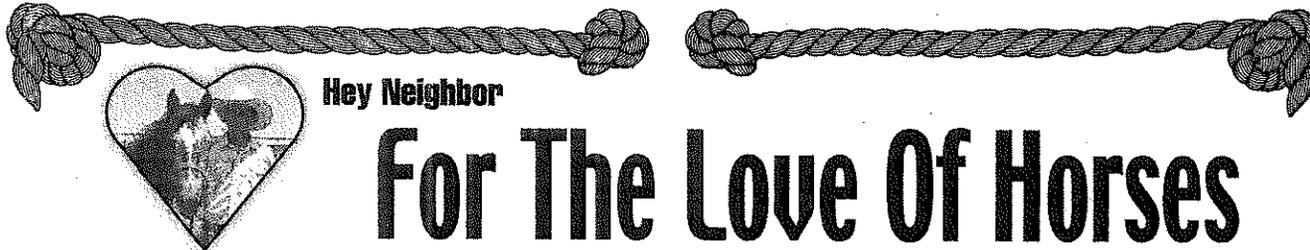
"An unprotected horse population would be at high risk because there is no special treatment or cure," Ostlund continued.

Supportive care, which may include feeding the horse with a stomach tube and giving it fluids, is all that can be done. Attempts should be made to keep the horse from injuring itself.

There are some serum products that contain specific West Nile antibody on the market. "This would be a specific treatment for West Nile, but I have not seen reports on effectiveness of the serum treatment," said Ostlund.

In addition to vaccinations, horsemen should destroy mosquito breeding places, such as stagnant or standing water. Insecticides in barn areas and insect repellent on horses also offer protection.

Prevention is much better than the risk of sleeping sickness.



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