



Healthy Happy Horses: Preventative Care **By Gerrie Barnes**

Preventative care is a topic that is near and dear to your veterinarian. Your vet would rather prevent disease or illness than get a middle of the night call with an emergency... especially an emergency call that could have been prevented.

Preventative care can include:

- Annual physical exam
- Annual dental exam
- Dental treatment as needed
- Appropriate immunizations
- Effective worming program
- Twice yearly avermectin treatment (special worming)
- Sheath cleaning for male horses (removal of the “bean”)
- Nutritional counseling
- Hoof care – to be discussed in a separate article

For financial and scheduling reasons, many horse owners bundle the horse’s preventative care into Spring visits and Fall visits.

The Spring visit generally covers a physical exam, dental exam, dental treatment, immunizations, avermectin treatment and nutritional counseling. Some dental work is extensive enough to require a separate visit to a dental tech or equine dentist. If only the points of the teeth need to be “floated”, many vets will do it during their Spring visit. The types of immunizations vary depending upon the part of the country you live in. Your local veterinarian will guide you as to what types are advisable. West Nile immunization has been added to the usual immunizations in Colorado.

The Fall visit generally covers a physical exam, immunization boosters (including West Nile) and nutritional counseling if needed.

To reduce the cost of preventative care, you can give your own immunizations (after you have been shown how by a veterinarian), do your own avermectin treatment and do your own sheath cleaning. However, the cost difference between doing this care yourself versus having your vet do it is minor, and I would strongly recommend having your veterinarian do the Spring and Fall preventative care for a few reasons. First, if your vet does home visits twice a year, he/she will know how to get out to your property if you have an emergency. Second, your veterinarian will know what your horse looks like when it is well. A baseline of physical information will be known to your vet and will help with any future diagnosis and treatment of illness or disease. Third, you will have developed a personal and financial relationship with your veterinarian.

There are many opportunities for our horses to be exposed to eggs and larvae. Worms can attack the intestines, body tissue and organs. Uncontrolled worms can result in fever, weight loss, colic and even death. Whether you use a daily dewormer or a purge dewormer, putting your horse on a disciplined

worming program is essential. Your overall worming program should include the Spring and Fall avermectin treatment.

Fly control not only controls peskiness and makes your horses more comfortable, it helps control the possibility of compromising your horse's health such as equine infectious anemia, stomach ulcers and worms. Flies also can cause blood loss and sores. Fly control can be most effective with 3 approaches: minimize fly attractants, kill fly eggs and externally repel the flies from your horse. Make sure that you keep manure picked up with your manure pile at some distance away from where your horse stands. Reduce fly eggs with beneficiary wasps and/or supplements that kill the eggs while still inside the horse. Top dress your horse's feed with vinegar or garlic. After a time, the vinegar or garlic will escape through the horse's skin and repel flies.

Your vet can clean your male horse's sheath annually and remove the "bean" that grows like a pearl near the urethra. We could only wish that the bean would be as valuable as a pearl. Your vet has the experience to do this unpleasant task without getting kicked by an unwilling horse.

Nutritional counseling is based on several factors including your horse's body score (6 - 7 is average in recreational, non-breeding horses), quality of the coat, alertness and other factors. If your horse is overweight or underweight, your veterinarian is the best source for adjusting his/her feeding program. If supplements are needed, your vet will suggest the type and quantity. Whoever is advising you should minimally be asking: How old is your horse, what do you use your horse for and how frequently do you use your horse for that activity.

Quality preventative care is the best insurance policy you can invest in for your horse.

Basic Tip: Many people wait to apply fly spray until after they have groomed. I suggest that you use fly spray before you groom. Your horse will be more comfortable during the grooming and you won't be between that annoying fly and your horse's kick or bite at it. Then I would fly spray again after grooming. I know this uses more fly spray, but I feel it is safer during fly season.