

## Equine Newsletter – May 2009

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### The truth about Equine Herpes Virus

It may come as a surprise but one of the most widespread and contagious viral diseases among horses is herpes virus. While many horse owners understand how infectious equine flu can be, few realise that equine herpes virus (EHV) spreads at a similar speed. There are two common types; the first (EHV<sub>1</sub>) can cause respiratory disease, abortion and even death to newborn foals. It can also trigger hind leg weakness, loss of coordination and paralysis. The second strain (EHV<sub>4</sub>) usually causes respiratory problems, but there have also been reported cases of abortion.

#### Creeping onset

The first signs of EHV are often mistaken as a bit of a cold or 'flu' and like so many respiratory diseases, EHV is easily spread from horse to horse through inhalation of infected droplets in the air, so early recognition is important.

*The symptoms of EHV include:*

- Fever
- Nasal discharge, which may contain mucus or pus
- Swollen glands
- Coughing

- Loss of appetite
- Depression/lethargy
- Paralysis in serious cases

It is estimated that a staggering 75% of infected horses become 'silent' carriers, able to pass EHV on to others without showing any signs. The disease can also remain dormant in previously infected horses and can be re-activated by 'stress' factors such as transport, competition or a change in environment.

#### Diagnosis

EHV cannot be differentiated from other respiratory infections on the basis of clinical signs. In order to diagnose EHV a swab is taken to look for the virus. If an abortion occurs the foetus must be examined in order to confirm EHV as the cause.

#### Vaccination

Vaccination is the only proven means of helping protect horses against EHV. One of our vets will be able to advise you on a vaccination programme and the frequency of booster vaccinations.

In addition to vaccination, good yard management is also important to help prevent the spread of EHV.

For further information, or to arrange for your horse to be vaccinated, speak to the practice.

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## Life's Little Irritations

Most horse owners think of the bot fly as an irritating insect buzzing around horses during the late summer and laying sticky eggs on their coats. However, surprisingly the majority of a bot fly's life is spent inside the horse, spending only their final months as adult flies.

### The bot's mission

The female bot fly mates and lays eggs during the late summer and early autumn months. The fly resembles a bee in size and shape and irritates horses causing them to try to move away. The little yellow eggs can be spotted on the horse's legs, chest and head between May and October. The horse will lick or bite itself where the eggs have attached which stimulates hatching and the larvae are taken into the horse's mouth. Once in the mouth, the bot larvae enter the horse by getting inside the cheek tissue or tongue where they stay for about a month before moving down to the stomach. After this they will spend around 10 months attached to the lining of the stomach or in the small intestine. Finally in the springtime the bot larvae will pass out of the body in the faeces, hatch into flies and set about laying eggs thus beginning the process all over again.

### Treatment

While the bot fly causes irritation to the horse by laying eggs on the skin, they can cause erosions and even mild colic while in the stomach. Therefore it is important to kill any larvae that have reached the horse's mouth. The most effective treatment is worming with an appropriate product following the first sharp frost in late autumn/early winter. This will kill the larvae. Waiting until the first frost will allow nature to kill off any surviving flies.

*There are practical steps that you can take to help to reduce the bot fly population:*

- Sponge down the areas where eggs are present with warm water and insecticide – the water stimulates hatching and the insecticide will kill them.
- Sponge legs with baby oil or petroleum jelly, this will suffocate eggs and stop hatching, but this will not remove them.
- Using a smooth blade such as a bot knife to carefully remove the hairs where eggs are attached.

For further advice about worming your horse speak to one of our vets.

## Strangles Vaccine

We are hearing rumours from the manufacturer that the long awaited return of the strangles vaccine is being planned. The current estimate is that the vaccine should be available again in January.

## Worming

Those of you on the health plan / loyalty scheme will be provided with wormers for the next quarter at the beginning of July. This summer the worming plan recommends Panacur so horses should be wormed every 6-8 weeks (early June, mid July and late August)