



The Species Specific Educational Resource Team (SSERT)

A Series for Small-Scale Producers and Hobby Owners

Best Management Practices to Prevent Diseases in Horses, Ponies, Mules, and Donkeys



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Keywords: Equine Disease Prevention, Best Management Practices for Horse Health

It is important to keep your horses healthy so that you may use and enjoy them. In this document, the term horse includes horses, ponies, donkeys, mules, and other equines. Many horses travel often, making it important to both protect them from diseases and to prevent them from spreading diseases to other horses, animals or humans. Best Management Plans can help prevent diseases from coming onto, or spreading from, your farm, ranch or stable. Remember good nutrition, proper health care, a comprehensive vaccination program, and reducing exposures are the best defenses against diseases.

Steps for Best Management Practices for Horses at the Home Farm, Ranch, or Stable:

1. Keep individual health records for every horse. Maintain a separate record for each horse which may be as simple as a folder, notebook, or binder. Make a plan and follow it. The record should contain:
 - a. Proof of Coggins Test results, Health Certificates, and other required tests (i.e., piroplasmiasis, CEM)
 - b. A Vaccination Plan
 - i. Consult your veterinarian on the recommended vaccinations for your area and for the locations that your horse may go to throughout the year.
 - ii. Keep and follow an annual vaccination schedule that includes when to vaccinate against each disease to give the best protection.
 - iii. Record each vaccination by date administered and list the scheduled dates for each booster.
 - c. A copy of the registration papers and photographs of the horse, its gender, age, and any identifying characteristics
 - d. Veterinary records (receipts) including a dated list of major diseases or major injuries
 - e. A Deworming Plan
 - i. Consult with your veterinarian,
 - ii. Make an annual plan for parasite management,
 - iii. Keep records of fecal tests,
 - iv. Keep records of the dates and brand name used (or generic name) for each deworming,
 - f. Records of the horse's travel (day, event, and location when he was away from home)
2. Keep wildlife away from your horses, especially the grain and hay. This may require special fencing around pastures, barn or stable repair, or trapping. Be sure to keep opossums, skunks, rats, birds, and raccoons out of horses' grain and hay. Do not feed horses grain or hay that has been contaminated with manure or "poop", or is moldy, dusty, or wet. A farm dog and barn cat may be helpful with pest control around the barn or stable. Keep grain in animal proof containers with a lid that can be tightly secured.
3. Feed and water horses in individual buckets or feeders that can be cleaned or sterilized. Keep horses on a regular feeding schedule with plenty of clean water. If you must change the horse's grain or hay, be sure to do so gradually over several days.

4. Use needles and syringes only once. Do not use the same needle and syringe on more than one horse. Dispose of all used needles and syringes in a sharps waste container – this is a plastic container box with a lid that is designed for safe disposal of sharp materials like needles, razors, blades, and sharp medical wastes that can puncture your skin.
 5. Learn horse body condition scores. Keep your horses at the recommended body condition score which is usually between 4-7 (you can only see a faint outline of the ribs with a body condition score of 4, in horses with body condition scores greater than 5 you can feel the ribs but not see them).
 6. Keep your equipment clean. Use separate brushes, bits, saddle pads, girths, and blankets for each horse and wash and sun-dry them, or sterilize them, every few weeks.
 7. Quarantine all incoming horses at a distance of 300 yards away from all horses that reside on the farm or in the stable for 2-6 weeks. This includes new horses and horses that have been away from home, including horses that have gone to shows, fairs, rodeos, trail rides, races, or been ridden or worked away from home. Handle the horse(s) that stayed at home first, then the quarantined horse(s). Wash your hands and change your clothes and boots or shoes (or disinfect them) between these two groups of horses. Be sure your boots or shoes are clean and free of dirt and manure before disinfecting.
 8. If a horse appears to be sick or depressed, isolate the horse for 2-6 weeks at a distance of 300 yards from all other horses. Work with the healthy horse(s) first, then the isolated horse(s). It is best if you wash your hands and change your clothes and boots or shoes (or disinfect them) between these two groups of horses. Be sure your boots or shoes are clean and free of dirt and manure before disinfecting.
 9. For trucks, trailers, tractors, and borrowed equipment coming onto the farm, ranch, or stable, wash them before exposing your horses.
 10. Wash your clothes and sterilize your shoes and boots after being on other farms or at horse activities and sales.
 11. For visitors to the farm, ranch or stable, it is good to observe their habits before they enter the barn or touch the horses. Ask them to wash their hands and to use a boot disinfectant before entering the barn. If you think that they have handled sick animals before coming to your farm, either refuse them or insist that they change their clothes, wash their hands, and disinfect their shoes or boots.
 12. Keep an emergency kit. It should contain a hoof pick, gauze, cotton leg wraps, vet wrap, clean towels, an animal rectal thermometer, a stethoscope, a flashlight or head lamp, latex gloves, telfa pads (non-adhesive bandages), alcohol, Betadine®, Veterocyn®, antimicrobial soap, blunt-end scissors, pain-killers (like phenylbutazone or Banamine®), antibiotic ointment, duct tape, wire cutters, a small hammer, and a knife.
- which you are traveling in advance to learn about other required tests and if additional vaccinations are needed.
2. If your horse looks depressed, stops eating, has a fever, or is sick, isolate him at home and do not take the horse to a place where there are other horses. Stay home and contact your veterinarian.
 3. Feed and water horses in individual buckets that can be cleaned or sterilized. Carry extra buckets for watering and feeding with you. Do not use common watering tanks or buckets that are borrowed. Instead fill your water buckets from faucets or carry horse drinking water with you in a closed container. If you must borrow a bucket, disinfect it with bleach before and after using it. Keep your horse(s) on their regular feeding schedule and provide plenty of clean water. Take your horse's grain, hay, and bedding with you and keep it in a secure place. If you must change the horse's grain or hay, be sure to do so gradually over several days.
 4. Take your own equipment. If you must borrow equipment, be sure to wash or sterilize it prior to use.
 5. Keep your horse(s) 300 yards away from other horses as much as possible. Park your trailer away from the others. Be alert, watch, and listen. If your horse is stabled while away from home, be sure that it is clean and has been disinfected. Check for loose wiring and dangerous electrical outlets. Watch for wildlife and sick or distressed horses. If you see horses that are coughing, sneezing, snorting, or with a "snotty" nose, isolate your horse immediately. You may want to talk to your veterinarian. Upon returning home, quarantine the horse for 2-6 weeks at 300 yards from other horses. If the horse becomes sick, isolate the horse for 2-6 weeks at 300 yards from other horses. Wash your hands and change your clothes and boots or shoes (or disinfect them) between these two groups of horses. Be sure your boots or shoes are clean and free of dirt and manure before disinfecting.
 6. Wash returning trucks, trailers, tractors and equipment before exposing your horses to them.
 7. Wash your clothes and sterilize your shoes and boots after being on other farms or at horse activities and sales.
 8. Carry an emergency kit (see list on prior page) and a cell phone.

References:

Scott, Brett D. "Best Management Practices for Equine Disease Prevention", Texas AgriLife Extension, Texas A&M University, B-6214,0909.

USDA-APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) online publications, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>

Steps for Best Management Practices for Horses While Away from Home:

1. Have the horse's vaccinations, Coggins Test, Health Papers, and dewormings up to date. Check with the location to

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