

# Tacoma Equine Hospital

3112 – 156<sup>th</sup> Street E. Tacoma, WA 98446 ♦ 253.535.6999

## Vaccination Protocols

The following is a list of vaccinations that we at Tacoma Equine Hospital recommend for the health of your horse, along with a brief description of the diseases that they each represent. The specifics of the vaccination schedules may differ depending on what your horse does for a living and where he/she is kept, so please call our office if you have questions concerning your own situation.

**Tetanus** is a disease caused by bacteria that is very commonly found in the soil and in the intestines of many animals. Horses are exposed via wounds, lacerations and foot abscesses. It causes rigid paralysis and 80% of horses that contract it die. This is an annual booster.

**Eastern & Western Encephalomyelitis**, or “Sleeping Sickness” is a viral neurological disease that is spread via infected mosquitoes. It usually begins with fever and depression, and progresses to a flaccid paralysis. It carries a 50% to 90% death rate depending on the viral strain. Humans can also be affected when bitten by the mosquito. This is an annual booster and it is best to give in the spring before the mosquitoes become active.

**Influenza** (Flu) is a viral respiratory disease that is very similar to the human flu. Fever, nasal discharge, and cough are the hallmark clinical signs. It is spread through the air via coughing and sneezing, and is therefore more common in horses stabled close together or in training with other horses. Boosters should be given up to four times per year.

**Rhinopneumonitis** (Rhino) is a viral disease caused by either equine herpesvirus 1 (EHV-1) or equine herpesvirus 4 (EHV-4), which encompasses three different symptoms. The most common is a respiratory disease similar to the flu. Secondly, it can cause late term abortion in pregnant mares. This is a good reason to give a “Pneumabort-K” shot at the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy. The vaccine will give a continuous immunity to Rhinopneumonitis and hopefully prevent an abortion if your mare is exposed to the virus. The third and least common symptom is paralysis. It starts with fever and general malaise, and can progress, either slowly or rapidly, from weakness to unsteadiness, to a paralyzed and down horse. The Rhino vaccine is given up to every three months.

**West Nile Virus** is a viral neurological disease that is spread via infected mosquitoes and birds. Horses are dead-end hosts and therefore cannot spread the disease to other animals. Symptoms may include incoordination, muscle weakness, partial paralysis, depression, convulsions, fever, coma, and death. There is no specific treatment at this time. The vaccine is boosted up to twice a year, best given in the spring before the mosquitoes become active.

**Strangles** is a bacterial disease caused by *Streptococcus equi* that causes abscesses in the lymph nodes, most commonly in the throat. They can become so big as to “strangle” the horse. Other symptoms are fevers up to 105°F, loss of appetite, and copious discharge from the nose. The worst-case scenario for a horse that can’t mount a strong immune response is “Bastard Strangles”. This refers to the development of other abscesses in hard to find places, like the abdomen, and a “poor-doer” situation. The intranasal vaccine is given once a year.

**Potomac Horse Fever** is named after the area in which the disease was first discovered, the Potomac River region. Scientists believe that flukes (flatworms), which carry the causative

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organism, *Neorickettsia risticii*, develop in aquatic snails that release them into the water in the summer. If horses are drinking from rivers or streams the flukes can be swallowed or, more commonly, they are picked up by aquatic insects that can then be ingested as a horse grazes. Therefore, it is a disease associated with ponds, lakes, streams, and other year-round water sources. PHF can show many different clinical signs, most commonly fever, depression, and loss of appetite. The hallmark of PHF is severe diarrhea, which occurs in 80% of cases. Treatment is very effective if given early in the disease and includes the antibiotic Oxytetracycline. Up to 80% of PHF cases eventually die, a portion of these due to secondary laminitis. Vaccination in endemic areas is twice yearly, but here on the west coast, where PHF is rare, the booster is an annual event.

**Rabies** is a virus spread by the bite of an infected animal. The most commonly infected animal in the Puget Sound area is the bat; skunks and raccoons can also spread the disease. Although not a common disease in the horse, once contracted it is always fatal. Worse than that, your horse can spread rabies to you through saliva. Symptoms of an infected animal are similar to other neurological diseases, progressing from depression and stupor to recumbency, seizures, and death, all within a very short period of time. An annual vaccine is cheap insurance to protect you and your horse from rabies.

*Consult with your veterinarian to determine the best vaccine plan for your horse!*