Port Perry Veterinary Services -Quarterly-

Equine Dentistry Basics

What is floating?

Horse's teeth are different from ours because they constantly erupt and are worn down over time by chewing. For a variety of reasons, horses develop sharp points on the edges of their teeth and other dental abnormalities. Floating is the process used to correct these abnormalities, whereby a portion of the horse's tooth is filed or ground down using an instrument called a float.

How often should my horse's teeth be floated?

We recommend having your horse's teeth checked annually during your horse's vaccination visit. Most horses need their teeth floated annually. Some horses require more frequent floating, including those with missing teeth, hooks, overbite, etc... Young horses benefit from more frequent exams because their permanent teeth are coming in until age 4-5. Some signs to suggest your horse's teeth need floating include difficulty chewing, weight loss, dropping feed when eating, showing resentment to the bit, head tossing or difficulty steering when riding, and foul odour from the mouth.

What is the difference between hand floating and power floating?

Hand floating involves the use of instruments guided by hand to float the teeth. Power floating involves the placement of a speculum to hold the horse's mouth open and floating using a motorized instrument. Veterinarians who use power floats have been specially trained to use them and are careful not to remove too much of the tooth, which could cause irreparable damage.

Do horses need to be sedated for floating?

Many horses do not need to be sedated for hand floating, however some horses do require sedation based on their temperament. We always sedate horses for power floating. This allows us to safely put the speculum in the horse's mouth so that we can visualize the entire mouth, and allows us to use the power float to make necessary corrections without unnecessarily stressing the horse.

How did wild horses manage without having their teeth floated?

Wild horses live quite a different lifestyle than our horses do. They are constantly grazing on grass allowing them to grind down their teeth more correctly and they are not expected to have bits in their mouths or be ridden. Our horses are fed diets that are usually high in concentrates in addition to hay, and are ridden or driven. Advances in nutrition and veterinary care, including dentistry, allow our horses to live longer, healthier lives than their wild counterparts.

What's New at the Clinic?

Join our Facebook Page! Keep up to date about upcoming events and ask our veterinarians questions.

Recently our doctors have taken some Continuing Education courses. Dr. Doherty and Dr. Busato did a small ruminant wasting disease course at Ontario Veterinary College. Dr. Doherty also attended a neurology and ophthalmology seminar at Caledon Equine Hospital. And Dr. McCrae attended Dairy Health Management annual update and a seminar on raising calves and vaccines at the Ontario Veterinary College.

We recently purchased new powerfloat equipment to take on more difficult dental cases.

Our receptionist, Pauline has just started her final year at Durham College for Advertising and will still continue to work part time here at the office.

CATTLE VACCINATION & DEWORMING

Vaccination is an important way to limit disease in your herd. There are numerous vaccines available intended to aid in the prevention of respiratory, gastrointestinal, or reproductive disease, including abortion. While there are differences between dairy and beef herds, it is recommended that all cattle are vaccinated against Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus (BVD type 1 & 2), Parainfluenza-3 (PI-3), Bovine Respiratory Syncytial Virus (BRSV) and Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR). Leptospirosis is important to vaccinate against if you have replacement heifers and breeding cows. Cattle entering feedlots should also receive vaccines that help protect against Mannheimia haemolytica and Histophilus somni.

The two primary types of vaccines available include modified-live vaccines and killed vaccines. The advantages of killed vaccines are they can be used at any stage of gestation, there is no risk of shedding, and partially used bottles can be re-used if correctly stored. They provide good immunity for 4-6 months if administered correctly. The disadvantage of killed vaccines is they only work if animals are boostered 2-4 weeks after the initial vaccination, so there is virtually no protection offered if they do not receive another vaccination within this timeframe. Modified-live vaccine (MLV) programs are usually recommended because a single vaccination provides protection (animals do need annual boosters), MLV products provide a stronger response with a longer duration of immunity and some products provide fetal protection. Modified-live vaccines also tend to be less expensive than killed vaccines. The primary disadvantage of modified-live vaccines is they can't be given to pregnant animals unless the cow has been vaccinated previously and a product claiming Fetal Protection is used. Also, there are concerns with shedding, partial bottles cannot be stored, and sunlight or chemicals easily inactivate the vaccines. However, a MLV program can be designed to work in any herd.

While talking about promoting the health of cattle, we cannot forget about parasite control. It is recommended that cattle be dewormed at least on an annual basis. If you are only deworming once a year, it should be done in the fall to reduce the parasite burden that overwinters in the cows. Coccidiostats are recommended to be a part of every producer's parasite control program. Your veterinarian can assist you in selecting the most suitable product(s) for your herd. If you have any questions regarding your vaccination or deworming programs please do not hesitate to call the office.

The following is a list of helpful vaccination tips:

- Use only approved MLV vaccines in pregnant animals.
- Only healthy animals should be vaccinated, avoid vaccinating heat stressed cattle.
- Do not vaccinate cows within 1 month after calving because they are immunosuppressed at this time.
- Use MLV products within one hour of mixing, do not try to store them.
- Do not administer corticosteroids (such as Dexamethasone) which are immunosuppressive, within 1 week of administering vaccines.
- Vaccines must be kept cold and out of direct sunlight, but should never be frozen.
- Use a fresh needle after vaccinating 5-10 cattle or more frequently if possible.