

ESMS NOTES

FROM THE DOCTOR'S DESK

Dr. Abra Wright



WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO BE AN EQUINE VETERINARIAN?

I have always been around horses and wanted to try to give back to the species that gave me so much as a child and young adult.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE JOB?

I enjoy all aspects of equine practice. One of my favorite things is working through a difficult case or watching patients I have treated go on to perform.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE HOBBIES?

Riding my horse, relaxing, spending time with my husband and going to church.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DEFENSE!

My mom used to always say "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," to remind me to wash my hands as a kid after I sneezed or coughed. I didn't understand how universal this statement was until I was an equine vet handling my 5th case of viral pneumonia at a show. Today's horse population is very mobile in comparison to previous decades; this can create the perfect medium for the spread of infectious diseases. Simple preventative measures can be performed to prevent and reduce the likelihood of your horse becoming infected or transmitting infectious diseases.

Most common infectious diseases that we as equine practitioners are concerned about are respiratory or gastrointestinal pathogens. Respiratory invaders include *Streptococcus equi* (Strangles), Equine Influenza virus, and Equine Herpes Virus-1 & 4 (Rhino). Strep equi bacteria gained its lay name of Strangles because it causes infection and swelling of the lymph nodes of the head leading to airway constriction. This bacteria can also be very difficult to clear from a premises. Viral pathogens typically cause high fevers and coughing, plus allow bacteria to access the lower airway leading to significant pneumonia. These pathogens are easily transferred from horse to horse through nose to nose contact or transfer through fomites. Fomites are objects (people included) that can carry the invader to another horse if not cleaned properly. These invaders are typically not dangerous to humans.

The gastrointestinal pathogens we are most concerned about in our adult show horses are bacterial causes of diarrhea, salmonella and clostridial specifically. These organisms can lead to potentially life threatening diarrhea and endotoxemia. Unlike the respiratory pathogens, these organisms can potentially cause disease in humans, depending on species. When discussing biosecurity - like a good football game - we need to focus on defense and offense. Simple measures can be taken to reduce a horse's exposure to potential pathogens; this would include not sharing buckets, grooming materials, or tack. Also, being conscious to not dip the end of a hose in each bucket or not spreading the stall contents of a horse with diarrhea on a pasture are simple but sometimes overlooked ways to help prevent the spread of disease. Vaccination or immunostimulant therapy are ways that we can help bolster a horse's immune system in regards to certain pathogens. These vaccines are aimed at the respiratory pathogens rather than gastrointestinal invaders. Making sure that the vaccines have been given in the past 4 months prior to an event should help decrease likelihood of becoming severely debilitated by those pathogens. If the vaccines are not current then they should be performed at least 2 weeks prior to the event. Immunostimulants are also helpful in creating a more functional immune system during stressful times.

Treatment of horses infected with these invaders is an obvious cost to consider, however there is also the cost associated with loss of training, showing, racing, or depression in growth due to illness. Working together with your veterinarian will ensure the best biosecurity plan available. Farm visits from a veterinarian can be vital to your horse's healthcare. This allows you and your veterinarian to discuss how horses are moved on and off of your facility and collaboratively develop preventative measures. These visits will allow you to better vaccinate, isolate, and quarantine horses on your facility. With an open mind and team attitude your facility could be a model of cleanliness that all should follow.

-Abra Wright, DVM, MS