

A young girl with light brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a grey jacket, is smiling and touching the face of a brown horse. The horse is wearing a halter with a red and white patterned strap. The background is slightly blurred, showing other horses and a green field.

# Equestrian GUIDE

# Emerging Diseases

**S**taying on top of emerging and re-emerging equine diseases can help you keep your horse alive and healthy.

Emerging and older diseases can destroy the equine population and cost the industry millions of dollars. This is why veterinarians and researchers throughout the world carefully monitor and track equine diseases spread worldwide — and you should too.

Several diseases are currently emerging in horses, contributing to loss of equine life and financial devastation.

Here are a few of some of the most common emerging equine diseases:

## **EQUINE ENTERIC CORONAVIRUS**

Equine enteric coronavirus has been on the rise in recent years in the Northeast, and it seems to be most prevalent during the colder months. The virus, which is transmitted by the fecal-oral route, manifests itself in one to four days. Common symptoms include fever, anorexia and lethargy. Some animals can continue shedding for several weeks.

## **ENCEPHALITIS**

Eastern equine encephalitis (EEE), western equine encephalitis (WEE) and Venezuelan equine encephalitis (VEE) are a group of viruses with a high mortality rate. This family of diseases is spread from infected wild birds by mosquitoes. EEE has been reported extensively around the southern and eastern US (most recently Massachusetts, Maine and Florida) this year. VEE causes high equine mortality rates (up to 80 per cent), but only very low-level human



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morbidity.

## **AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS**

Clinical signs are variable, but usually include pyrexia (fever) following an incubation period of up to five days. Affected horses show labored breathing and copious nasal discharge. Mortality rates as high as 95 per cent have been reported, with

death occurring rapidly after the onset of clinical signs.

Occasionally a cardiac form of the disease occurs, with lesions appearing on the head and neck. Mortality is lower, at approximately 60 percent for this form. A mild form of the disease — usually called horse fever — occurs occasionally, causing only slight and transient pyrexia.

Reports in Columbia this year and serological findings in Argentina have been reported with no clinical signs. It is unlikely horses carrying these diseases could be imported, but given the relatively high level of horse transportation to and from South America, they are worth being aware of. Other similar encephalitis viruses are present worldwide.

# Choosing a Facility

**B**oarding facilities are probably the most critically important determinant of your horse's overall health and happiness. Here are some things to consider when picking a facility.

## BARN DESIGN

You will want to know how much sun gets in the barn, if there are windows in the stalls, if the windows permit natural light, if the ceilings are tall enough and if there is plenty of ventilation. Also find out if the barn stays warm enough in winter without closing every door and window, if it is heated in winter and if fresh air is allowed in the barn.

Here are some other questions you should consider: Is the footing too deep or too rocky? Are the rings level? Are the rings watered regularly to keep dust down? Are the rings over-watered, so as to cause slippery footing? Is there somewhere to ride outside of a ring? It's always good to ride your horse out of the ring at least once a week, even if it's only for five minutes. Even a casual switch-up in riding environment is great for their brain and their body.

## TURNOUT POLICY

Does the facility's turnout policy square with your horse's needs? Does your horse do well in group turnout? Does the facility offer group turnout? Are there different herds for mares and geldings? Are there different herds for temperament? Does



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your horse need individual turnout and does the facility offer that? If so, do they get all day turnout? Are they out for a few hours, or maybe every other day? Are individual turnouts too big or too small? Are the pastures or paddocks over grazed? Are the pastures

and paddocks full of green grass that is perfectly manicured? Lots of pretty green grass is a sign of very limited turnout.

## TURNOUT FENCING

Horse pasture fencing is expensive. Barbed wire fenc-

ing is a telltale sign of a low-rent facility. Four-nail white vinyl, on the other hand, is the sign of an uppity barn. Pick somewhere in the middle. Old fencing is not necessarily bad; just be sure to walk the fence lines during the barn tour.

## FEEDING PROGRAMS

Many horse owners fail to research horse feeds and feeding programs and instead rely too much on trainers, barn owners, and barn managers to get horse nutrition right. Nutrition consultation should be a top priority.

# Becoming a Breeder

**H**orse breeders evaluate animals, direct breeding and oversee the general care of horses. They aim to combine scientific knowledge and experience to eliminate unwanted traits while retaining desirable ones in offspring.

Desirable qualities can vary by intended use of the animal. Recreational riding generally only requires a horse with a calm, quiet demeanor, while horses for performance and racing must meet specific physical standards.

Horse breeders also may have administrative responsibilities, including record keeping, marketing and sales. They also may coordinate and manage the work of other professionals, such as animal handlers, veterinarians, artificial insemination technicians and geneticists.

The process of selecting mares and stallions to breed begins with researching pedigrees, genealogical records that include physical characteristics of an animal's ancestors. They also research health histories of animals to increase chances of reproduction and avoid inherited conditions, such as hemophilia and hip dysplasia. A breeder might contract the services of bloodstock agents, who specialize in pedigree information and evaluation.

Horse breeders consult with or employ other animal science professionals to determine when a mare is ready for insemination. Breeders carefully manage the nutrition of stallions and mares and must consider behavior and age



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when deciding to use artificial insemination or more natural mating techniques.

Aside from reproduction, breeders are responsible for the day-to-day care of horses and their offspring, including feeding, exercise and vaccina-

tions. They keep pedigree and health records for their own animals and treat minor illnesses and injuries.

There are no strict education requirements for becoming a horse breeder. A horse breeder can learn the scientific con-

cepts and techniques involved in breeding by completing a bachelor's degree in animal science. Relevant coursework includes animal nutrition, genetics, husbandry and horse management.

Purchasing and caring for

horses requires a considerable financial investment. Breeders must be able to provide a stable and related facilities, transportation and food. They also must hire other workers to assist them with the immense chores of caring for equines.

# Becoming a Riding Instructor

**A**s a horse-riding instructor, you'll spend your days teaching people of all ages and skill levels how to properly ride horses. You may also teach others equine care techniques.

In this recreational field, some work may be seasonal. You also may need to work weekends, and your hours could vary. Here are some steps you should take to become a horse-riding instructor.

## **BECOME A PROFICIENT RIDER**

Aspiring instructors should have expertise in riding and grooming horses. Instructors also should be able to ride at a walk, trot or canter in an arena; learning proper safety precautions is important, as well. Some stables and equestrian centers offer both group and private lessons. Spending extra time around horses and volunteering at a stable is a great way to gain additional insight into this field. Observing professional instructors may be helpful, as well.

## **GAIN INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS**

A good teacher must be able to clearly and concisely impart knowledge to others. Prospective riding coaches also should be able to design effective methods of instruction and implement them in ways that benefit both horses and riders. A few private organizations and schools offer training programs or clinics for aspiring instructors. Common topics include teaching methods, equine law, emergency procedures and horse selection.

## **EARN A COLLEGE DEGREE**

While not necessary to become a horse-riding instructor, an associate's

or bachelor's degree in equine studies can provide valuable, in-depth knowledge of horses and horsemanship techniques.

Some of the courses you might take include horse management, equine reproduction, horsemanship, equine behavior and ethics in the equine industry.

## **CONSIDER CERTIFICATION**

Several organizations offer opportunities for certification in specialties, including western pleasure and equitation, dressage, show jumping, hunt seat and riding to hounds. Tests are available in several levels of competency for each specialty.

Some organizations offer five- or seven-day clinics at approved host facilities. Expert clinicians evaluate the applicants as they teach practice lessons, participate in workshops and take written tests. Students may become certified in a number of different specialties at levels ranging from assistant instructor to clinic instructor.

The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) provides three levels of certification for those who wish to become therapeutic riding instructors. These professionals use horsemanship to provide unique therapies and activities that enrich the lives of children and adults suffering from illnesses, disabilities or injuries.



# Common Afflictions

To ensure that your horse lives a long, healthy life, become familiar with some of the common ailments that can affect horses. To accomplish this goal, it is important to establish a relationship with a local equine vet.

A good vet can give you advice on deworming and vaccinations, while also observing your horse closely and monitoring it aggressively for common ailments. Some of the most common afflictions:

## COLIC

Colic is a catchall name for several different serious digestive problems that commonly afflict horses. You must deal with suspected colic immediately, as all forms can be fatal. The condition can be caused by a blockage of the intestines caused by improper food or foreign objects, or other factors such as excessive gas in the intestines, which is usually caused by a rapid change in diet. Sometimes the intestines become twisted. Colic also can be caused by gastrointestinal parasites. The most serious type results from the intestines becoming twisted, which normally requires surgery to correct.

Surgery for severe colic is expensive, and not all horses survive. This is why it is imperative to seek care at the first signs of colic.

You can help prevent colic by feeding your horse a proper diet, ensuring that he always has clean water available, not allowing him to ingest dirt, sand or other inappropriate materials, making any dietary changes gradually, and performing deworming regularly as recommended by your veterinarian.

## HEAVES

“Heaves” is the commonly used word for the medical condition known



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as recurrent airway obstruction (RAO). This is a chronic respiratory inflammation frequently caused by an allergic reaction to airborne particles. It bears some resemblance to asthma in humans. RAO is most often seen in horses who are in their stable a lot and exposed to dust and molds from old hay and straw.

The signs of heaves include shortness of breath (especially after exertion), moist coughing (often but not always producing copious phlegm),

and wheezing. In severe cases, afflicted horses will struggle to breathe. Horses who have heaves for a long time will develop “heave lines” — a prominent bulge of muscle along the ribs.

The best treatment and prevention for heaves is to keep your horse outside as much as possible. Additionally, eliminate sources of mold and dust by throwing out and replacing old hay and bedding, soaking hay in water before feeding, cleaning out stalls frequently, and anything else you can do

to reduce your horse’s exposure to potentially harmful airborne particles. Once a horse has heaves, he may need to be medicated for the rest of his life, and his ability to work or perform may be limited.

## LAMINITIS

Laminitis is an inflammation of certain internal structures of the hoof. This painful and serious condition causes lameness; the horse may lie down to try to relieve the pain in his hooves. The affected foot may feel hot to the touch. There are numerous causes, most relating to some type of whole-body stress (trauma, colic surgery, hormonal disorders, etc.). Another common cause is eating too much grain. Other less common causes are untreated infections, working a horse on very hard ground (e.g., asphalt), reactions to drugs, and reactions to agricultural chemicals, especially herbicides and fertilizers.

Treatment may involve cold packs, anti-inflammatory drugs, and/or orthotic devices.

## PARASITES

Horses, like any other animals that spend a lot of time outdoors, are often exposed to parasites. A wide range of parasitic organisms can afflict your horse, including ticks, lice, pinworms, tapeworms, roundworms and lungworms.

It is virtually impossible to remove all parasites from your horse; rather, you should seek to reduce its parasite load as much as possible.



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# Horse Investment

**T**here are two ways to make money on a horse: racing and breeding. But before getting into horse investing, seek out someone who knows the thoroughbred business and develop a plan.

Even though horse racing is speculative, it is smart to have a business plan. It is important to know how much money you can risk. You also need to identify your investment horizon goals.

An initial investment can vary greatly depending on a horse's age, pedigree and racing history.

The average price is between \$20,000 and \$500,000

for a thoroughbred. It is possible, however, to buy a horse for as little as \$5,000, or easily pay \$1 million. A good advisor ensures that a new owner recognizes all of fees involved. The purchase price is just the beginning.

It costs roughly \$35,000 a year to keep a horse in training. If your horse gets injured, you can forget about race money, and the value of your

horse may decrease.

Most beginners would be better off if they joined a partnership. Horse syndicates buy horses and offer prospective owners a 5 or 10 percent stake. It limits risk and exposure and gives new owners a chance to learn the ropes.

How much you can make also varies from race to race. In higher paying ones, known as stakes, there could be

\$50,000 or more than a \$1 million in the purse. The winner generally gets 60 percent; second place, 20 percent, and third, 10 percent. Of the winner's money, the jockey and trainer each get 10 percent; the owner gets the rest.

Male horses are worth more. A stallion can father 150 foals a year, while a mare can birth just one.

To make money, owners

have to sell a horse at the most opportune time — usually after it has just won a race and is at peak value.

Although many people like to race because of the action, others find breeding to be less stressful. Selling foals can make you money.

Horse breeding involves taking a mare with a certain pedigree and matching it to a stallion.

# Choosing a Veterinarian

Some day you'll arrive at your barn and your horse just won't be acting right. Maybe it will be showing signs of colic or not putting weight on one of its legs.

Chances are he needs to see a veterinarian, but you don't want to wait until that day comes before selecting or evaluating a doctor.

Consider the following nine qualities when selecting or evaluating a veterinarian for your horse.

## COMMUNICATION

Owners should ask themselves if their veterinarians understand their needs. The vet should explain exams or procedures step by step, outline costs in advance, explain diagnostic and treatment options, describe potential outcomes and follow up and provide support after the work is done.

Communicating with a veterinarian before selecting him or her to treat your horse can help you discover whether he has a philosophy about care that is similar to your own.

Owners and veterinarians don't have to think exactly the same on every issue, however, to have a good relationship.

## EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

A candidate veterinarian's background can be as important to you as a job seeker's resume is to a company's human resources official. Where and when did a veterinarian receive his or her degree? How much experience does he or she have? Has he or she specialized in a particular field? You also might want to choose a veterinarian who specializes in a particular sport.

## CHARACTER

Owners also should decide how they rank their veterinarian's "bedside manner." One owner might not feel com-



fortable unless a vet is friendly and chatty.

Another might find that superfluous, especially if the practitioner excels in other areas.

## GOOD HORSEMANSHIP

Not every horse is easy to handle, but veterinarians should not lose their tem-

per, even with difficult patients. They should be able to explain to the owner what they are going to do to solve the impasse and, whatever the solution, it should look like it's easy rather than an epic struggle.

## GROUP VS. SOLO PRACTICE

Whether you want a veterinarian who

works alone or is part of a larger practice is a personal choice.

You might only feel comfortable when the same person sees your horse every time. On the other hand, a multi-vet practice could give you access to more experience and knowledge than one vet, as well as more flexible scheduling options.