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### **ARE YOUR DOGS AND HORSES VACCINATED?**

Are your dogs and horses up to date with their vaccinations? There have been outbreaks of parvovirus in dogs in the Hunter Valley and Canberra and strangles in horses in Canberra recently and vaccination is the best way to prevent both diseases affecting your animals.

#### **PARVOVIRUS**

Parvovirus can affect dogs of all ages but is most common in young dogs, with young puppies the most severely affected and the most difficult to treat. The disease most commonly starts with vomiting, fever and lethargy and quickly progresses to haemorrhagic (bloody) diarrhoea. Dogs that are not treated will die from the disease within a matter of days. If treatment is delayed, the chances for survival are greatly reduced.

Canine parvovirus is present in the faeces of infected dogs. Susceptible animals (immunosuppressed or non-vaccinated) become infected by ingesting the virus. Direct contact between dogs is not required to spread the virus as it can be carried on people's shoes or clothes and can survive in the environment for several months. As it is pretty much impossible to avoid exposure to parvovirus, prevention of disease is the key.

#### **HOW CAN I PREVENT MY DOG FROM GETTING PARVOVIRUS?**

**Vaccinate, vaccinate, vaccinate.** It is crucial that all young dogs receive at least two (and preferably three) vaccinations (typically around 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age) covering them against parvovirus, distemper and hepatitis. Puppies that receive fewer or no vaccinations are much less likely to survive a parvovirus infection as they have less immunity with which to fight the disease.

#### **CAN PARVOVIRUS BE TREATED?**

Yes – while there is no cure for parvovirus, immediate supportive treatment is aimed at nursing the infected dog through the disease to give the dog's immune system time to fight off the virus. The treatment will typically take 5 or more days and involves quarantining the dog, large quantities of intravenous fluids (to replace the fluid lost through vomiting and diarrhoea and correct salt and mineral imbalances), antibiotics (to cover against infections caused by the loss of gut lining and the reduction in white blood cells), anti-emetics (to reduce the amount of vomiting) and pain relief. Unfortunately, even with intensive and expensive treatment, not all dogs will survive a parvovirus infection. The cost of vaccination is around \$175 (for three vaccinations) for each puppy. The cost of treatment is usually between \$500 and \$700 but can go as high as \$1500, and is unfortunately not always successful. As the old saying goes, prevention is better than cure.

#### **STRANGLES**

Strangles is a highly contagious bacterial infection of the respiratory tract in horses. It is commonly seen in young horses but can affect horses at any age. Disease can occur sporadically or as an outbreak. Clinical signs include fever, depression and inappetance, nasal discharge (initially clear then becomes yellow-green), swollen lymph nodes (which may abscess and rupture), and in advanced cases, trouble swallowing or breathing.

Strangles is spread by nasal discharge but also by contamination of tack, grooming equipment, feed bins and rugs. It can also be spread by people who handle infected horses.

#### **HOW CAN I PREVENT MY HORSE FROM GETTING STRANGLES?**

Vaccination against Strangles will reduce the severity of the clinical signs but unfortunately does not guarantee your horse will not get the disease. It will however prevent your horse from developing potentially fatal complications. Horses that travel to shows or other competition events are at increased risk of being in contact with an infected animal so should be vaccinated. Any place where a large number of horses come and go, such as studs or breeding centres, increases the risk of a horse contracting Strangles.

Once horses reach three months of age, vaccination can begin with three doses of the vaccine given two weeks apart. After the initial course, boosters are advised every six months. Broodmares should also be vaccinated every six months and pregnant mares can be vaccinated up to two weeks before foaling. The Strangles vaccine is available as a Strangles-only vaccine or in combination with the Tetanus vaccine.

Other important prevention strategies include quarantine of any new arrivals for 3-4 weeks and being careful with hygiene when dealing with infected or possibly infected horses.

#### **CAN STRANGLES BE TREATED?**

Yes – similar to parvovirus, treatment involves supportive therapy such as anti-inflammatories, extended courses of antibiotics (if caught early enough) and fluids. The affected horses will need to be isolated from other horses for several weeks until they stop shedding the infectious organism. In most cases, once the lymph nodes have abscessed and drained, the infected horse will recover uneventfully. However, they may continue to spread the disease for several weeks to months after recovery.

If you have any questions about vaccination for parvovirus or Strangles, please contact the friendly team at Cowra Veterinary Centre.

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