

tetanus vaccination for horses

easy to prevent but difficult to treat

Tetanus occurs when a wound becomes infected with bacterial spores of *Clostridium tetani*. This organism is most commonly present in soils contaminated by animal manure. These spores germinate, multiply and produce a very powerful toxin which affects the muscles.

Deep wounds, or tissues from which the blood supply has been cut off, are favourable sites for the organisms, however some cases of tetanus occur from wounds that are so small they are not noticed. The onset of signs occurs usually from 7-14 days after injury, but occasionally may be earlier or much later.

To the inexperienced observer, the signs of tetanus may be confused with those of other diseases. An affected horse characteristically shows increased muscle stiffness and spasm and prolapse of the third eyelid. The disease progresses rapidly with death within 5-10 days. Even with aggressive treatment, the prognosis for an affected horse is extremely poor.

tetanus prevention

Vaccination is the only way to provide safe, effective long-term protection against tetanus.

tetanus antitoxin (Equivac™ TAT)

If an unvaccinated horse is injured, tetanus antitoxin must be administered to provide immediate, short-term protection. Tetanus antitoxin alone provides protection within 2-3 hours of injection, but it only lasts for 3 weeks, and horses can develop tetanus once the levels of antitoxin have dropped below the protective level.

tetanus toxoid (Equivac™ T)

It is recommended that horses be actively immunised for permanent protection. After the initial toxoid dose, a period of 9-14 days is required is required for the development of effective immunity.

A **single** dose of toxoid given to an unimmunised horse at the time of wounding or surgery may not prevent tetanus.

A **second** dose given four weeks after the initial dose should ensue a high level of immunity. A **third** booster dose is given a year later, to ensure long last immunity. It is recommended to then repeat boosters every five years.

Pregnant mares should be vaccinated 4-8 weeks prior to foaling to ensure adequate colostral anti-tetanus antibodies. Foals should begin their vaccination program at 3 months of age. Animals that have recovered from natural infection are not immune and still require vaccination for protection.

