



updates from the field

News



RSPCA Goulburn Vaccination Drive

At CVH we're committed to supporting community initiatives, especially if they involve animal welfare and supporting people who may otherwise not be able to afford veterinary care for their pets. CVH vets Will Lucas and Alison Johnson volunteered at the recent RSPCA Goulburn Vaccination Drive, helping to vaccinate 32 cats and 110 dogs, a terrific result! Goulburn RSPCA Branch volunteer Marilyn Manfred said the event was held to assist pension and healthcare card holders from the Goulburn and Mulwaree area by providing discounted dog and cat vaccinations for their pets.

The vaccination issue

Welcome to our vaccination issue. Vaccination is such a hot topic (and political football), it's timely to highlight the importance of vaccination in animals as well as in humans. Vaccination protects pets and livestock against infectious and often fatal diseases including parvovirus in dogs, feline panleukopaenia in cats, tetanus in horses (see page 2) and clostridial diseases in sheep, cattle and alpacas.

We have good reason to remind people about the dangers of vaccination complacency. During March, we've hospitalised unvaccinated dogs with parvovirus, requiring intensive (and expensive) medical and barrier nursing treatment in our isolation ward. In February this year, an outbreak of feline panleukopaenia (caused by a feline parvovirus) was reported in Sydney cats for the first time in forty years. The outbreak in unvaccinated cats closed pounds and animal facilities to cats across Sydney and in country NSW, highlighting the large number of unvaccinated, unprotected and vulnerable cats in our communities.

Vaccinating animals protects people

It's not only animals that benefit from vaccination. CVH vets are accredited to administer Equivac® HeV vaccine to horses, protecting against the contagious and deadly Hendra virus that spreads from flying foxes to horses, and horses to humans. Discovered in Brisbane in 1994, the virus has since killed over 80 horses (75% of those infected) and four of the seven humans diagnosed with the disease. We strongly advise owners of horses travelling, competing or mixing closely with other horses to vaccinate against Hendra virus. Horses can be vaccinated from 4 months of age and require 2 vaccinations three weeks apart, a once-off six-month booster, then booster vaccinations annually.

Farmers know too well the sudden deaths that can occur from the big five clostridial diseases in unvaccinated sheep and cattle, but leptospirosis, included in seven-in-one vaccination for cattle, can cause serious disease in humans. The leptospira organism spreads to humans – often livestock producers and farm workers – via infected urine and body tissues of cattle and other animal species. It causes severe illness in humans, including kidney failure and meningitis.

Talk to us about vaccination schedules to protect your pets, horses and livestock.

Caring for wildlife

CVH staff are dedicated to taking in sick or injured native birds, animals or reptiles, free of charge. We have worked closely with WIRES (Wildlife Information and Rescue Service) for over two decades, and with Wildcare.

This handsome young wombat visited CVH after his mum was killed by a car. He was fortunate to escape injury and will eventually be released back into the wild. Another recent case involved an echidna with a massively swollen, infected front leg. Unable to walk and extremely thin, she was found by a member of the community, hospitalised for many weeks at CVH, then at the University of Sydney Wildlife Health and Conservation Clinic for more R and R. She recovered against all odds to be released back where she was found.

Don't hesitate to ring us on (02) 4832 1977 for wildlife advice – the first few hours for injured or orphaned wildlife can be critical to their survival and ultimate release back into the wild. You can also contact the local Southern Tablelands branch of WIRES directly on (02) 4822 3888.



updates from the field

The vaccination issue: tetanus in horses

Tetanus can occur in any animal (including humans), but horses are one of the most vulnerable species. The disease is painful and fatal in more than 50% of cases.

Spores of *Clostridium tetani* are commonly found in soil and animal faeces and enter the body through fresh wounds. The anaerobic Clostridial bacteria thrive in low oxygen levels – puncture and other deep wounds allow the spores to flourish and release the tetanus toxin.

The toxin affects the nervous system, specifically the nerves controlling muscles, causing painful and progressively worsening muscle stiffness and spasm.

Symptoms

Clinical signs begin 3 to 21 days after infection. The affected horse becomes stiff and has difficulty moving and eating. Characteristic symptoms include:

- a stiff gait with the horse adopting a 'saw horse' stance – all four limbs planted apart and the tail stretched out
- the head and neck become extended, the third eyelids prolapse across the eyes, nostrils are flared, ears pricked and the jaw is rigid and 'locked': the horse can't eat and has difficulty swallowing
- the animal becomes hypersensitive to noise and touch
- spasm of the facial muscles produces the classic *risus sardonicus*, with the muscles of the lips pulled back to show the teeth
- in fatal cases, the horse eventually collapses with the worsening spasms, and death results from respiratory failure.

Treatment

Treatment is difficult, intensive, expensive and often unsuccessful. Untreated horses will almost always die. The tetanus antitoxin provides immediate temporary immunity and the horse should be vaccinated at the same time. The antitoxin acts to bind the toxins before they get to the spinal cord. If toxins are already in the central nervous system, while antitoxin can't stop the disease, it can neutralise any toxins that have not yet made it to the spinal cord.

If the wound can be found, it should be opened and cleaned out to reduce the anaerobic conditions. Antibiotics help counter the infection, intravenous fluids aid hydration while the horse is unable to eat and drink, and sedatives and muscle relaxants minimise spasms and help keep the animal quiet.

It's important to move quietly and calmly around animals with tetanus, avoid sudden movements and noise, and handle as little as possible. Putting the horse in a dark, quiet place can help lessen external stimuli and prevent the triggering of spasms.



Above top: classic tetanus 'saw horse' stance with head and tail extended, the horse balancing with all four feet planted apart.
Above bottom: third eyelid prolapse, nostrils flared, ears pricked.

Prevention

Vaccination is the only way to protect a horse from tetanus. CVH stocks all equine vaccines and, to protect against tetanus, we recommend the following vaccination schedule:

1. foals between 3 to 6 months of age and unvaccinated adult horses require a course of 2 doses, 4 weeks apart, to achieve good initial immunity
2. adults and young horses over 12 months of age should receive an annual booster after the initial 2 dose course, then 5 yearly or booster at the time of injury
3. pregnant mares should be vaccinated 4 weeks prior to foaling. This gives protection for several months until the foal's vaccination course begins
4. vaccinated horses should receive a booster at the time of injury
5. injured non-vaccinated horses or those with an unknown vaccination history should receive both the tetanus antitoxin and tetanus vaccination, with a follow up booster vaccination in 4 weeks.

Contact us

Opening hours 8.30am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday | 9am – 12pm Saturday

24 hour emergency service on (02) 4832 1977

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