

# Horse Health Topics

## **Dr. Nancy Leverenz, D.V. M. on Rabies**

I feel it is very important for us to vaccinate our horses against rabies because rabies is a zoonotic disease, meaning people catch it. Most people feel that their horse won't go near a rabid animal, but the reality is that a rabid animal does not act normally and will go in the pen with the horse; the horse sniffs it and gets bitten.

We put our hands in our horse's mouth everytime we put the bit in their mouth. Rabies is passed through the saliva to an open wound on our hand or the horse bites us because he no longer acting normally.

The early signs of rabies in a horse are sometimes very difficult to discern. Rabies must be considered as part of the differential diagnosis for all neurologic problems. So please vaccinate your horses against rabies.

## **How to Reduce Gastric Ulcers Risk in Horses (Transitions, May 2007)**

Ulcers are a man-made disease, affecting up to 9 percent of racehorses and 60 percent of show horses. Stall confinement alone can lead to the development of ulcers. A horse's feeding schedule also can be a factor. When horses are fed just twice a day, the stomach is subjected to a prolonged period without feed to neutralize its naturally produced acid. In addition, high grain diets produce volatile fatty acids that can also contribute to the development of ulcers.

Stress, both environmental and physical, can increase the likelihood of ulcers, as can hauling, training and mixing groups of horses. Strenuous exercise can decrease the emptying of the stomach and the blood flow to the stomach, thus contributing to the problems.

The treatment and prevention of gastric ulcers is directed at removing these predisposing factors, thus decreasing acid production with the horses' stomach. Follow these tips from the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) to properly treat your horse's ulcers:

1. Allow free choice access to grass or hay. Horses are designed to be grazers with a regular intake of roughage.
2. If the horse must be stalled, arrange for the horse to see the horses he socializes with.
3. Feed the horses more frequently to help buffer the acid in the stomach.
4. Decrease grains that form volatile fatty acids.
5. Medications that decrease acid production are available, but are only necessary in horses showing signs of clinical disease or when the predisposing factors, such as stress, cannot be removed.

The prevention of ulcers is the key. Limiting stressful situations along with frequent feeding or free choice access to grass or hay is imperative. Neutralizing the production of stomach acid is nature's best antacid. For more information about gastric ulcers, ask your equine veterinarian for the "Equine Gastric Ulcers" brochure provided by the AAEP in association with Nutrena, and AAEP educational partner. Additional information also can be found on the AAEP's horse health Web site, [www.myHorseMatters.com](http://www.myHorseMatters.com).