

Routine Health Care of Horses

Coggins Test: This is a blood test for Equine Infectious Anemia. The state of Texas requires that any horse must have a negative Coggins Test conducted within the last 12 months. The state also requires that any horse changing ownership within the state have a negative Coggins Test within the last 120 days. It is suggested that any horse changing residence should have a negative test within the last 12 months. Any show, sale or barn may require more frequent testing than the state. Therefore, make sure you not only fulfill state requirements, but also specific requirements set up by individual organizations.

Dental Care: A dental/oral exam should be done every six months. Most horses need to have their teeth floated once yearly. Unlike many other species, horses' teeth are continually worn and extruded throughout their lives. Since the upper arcade is set farther apart than the lower arcade, the outsides of the upper teeth and the insides of the lower teeth wear more slowly and can become very long, sharp and pointed. Horses masticate by moving their teeth from side to side; therefore, these lengthened portions of teeth can prevent proper chewing (locking up). This in turn interferes with proper digestion and can cause ill thrift and weight loss. Improperly floated, or teeth which need floating, can also cause mouth pain leading to head tossing, pulling the head to one side, unresponsiveness to the bit, inability to collect, and sometimes even lameness.

Hoof Care: The frequency of trimming and shoeing is very variable from horse to horse, depending on many factors. A horse should not go longer than six weeks without being trimmed, or more frequently if the horse is in constant use. Horses' hooves should be picked daily to avoid thrush, to locate any foreign objects that can cause problems, such as stones or nails, and if shod, to check for loose shoes.

Grooming: All horses, especially those with histories of skin problems, should be groomed on a daily basis. A good stiff curry, worked well into the coat, does a better job of cleaning than most baths. After currying, brush the loose dander away with a stiff brush followed by a soft brush.