Researchers Study Equine Influenza Vaccination Schedules

The global horse community has long recognized the necessity of vaccinating against equine influenza (EI). However, immunization protocols are not universal: There is no recognized standard regarding intervals between EI vaccinations.

In an effort to begin laying scientific groundwork for establishing an international norm, Ann Cullinane, MVB, PhD, MRCVS, and colleagues at the Irish Equine Centre, in Johnstown, evaluated the efficacy of three vaccination schedules on 55 seronegative (showing no detectable EI antibodies) horses:

- **Group 1** (the minimal vaccination interval permissible by Irish racing authorities): Doses 1 and 2 were given three weeks apart, followed by Dose 3 five months later;
- **Group 2** (the vaccine manufacturer’s recommended immunization schedule): Doses 1 and 2 were given six weeks apart, followed by Dose 3 five months later; and
- **Group 3** (the maximum vaccination interval permissible by Irish racing authorities): Doses 1 and 2 were given 13 weeks apart, followed by Dose 3 seven months later.

The team measured antibodies in whole blood samples from all horses at each vaccination, as well as three to five weeks post-vaccination.

Something we learned as 2014 wrapped up: Our readers really, really like research on the best ways to reward their horses.

A popular blog post (TheHorse.com/34596) and article (TheHorse.com/34855) focusing on whether horses prefer scratching or patting as a reward have created a buzz on social media.

While research shows that horses enjoy scratching rather than patting, readers continued to debate the issue.

Some readers think horses prefer the excitement of a strong pat following a great performance, some say their horses opt for a reward they can eat, and others say the proper reward depends on the horse.

**What do you think your horse prefers?**
—Erica Larson

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**Foals Follow Dams’ Leads When Dealing With Scary Objects**

The old adage “mother knows best” doesn’t just apply to humans—it can apply to horses as well: Danish researchers recently observed that foals that watched their mothers calmly handle scary objects ended up being less fearful when they faced frightening situations on their own.

Janne Winther Christensen, PhD, and colleagues found that these foals more readily accepted frightening situations than foals whose dams were not habituated to scary objects.

The test foals also showed more “individual discovery” than control foals, she added; because test foals were free to move about during the mares’ habituation sessions, they often explored scary objects on their own.

“This is definitely something we would recommend to breeders,” who could habituate mares to frightening stimuli and help new foals learn to handle scary objects every year, said Christensen.

Learn more about the study at TheHorse.com/34801.
—Christa Lesté-Lasserre, MA

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

**SOME SPORT HORSES ACTUALLY HAVE LARGE HEARTS**

Owners often affectionately say their horses have “big hearts.” But if a horse completes intense workouts, he might literally have a huge heart.

Ritkke Buhl, PhD, of the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, said it’s still not clear whether this so-called “athlete’s heart” is related to the sudden deaths that sometimes occur during or just after exercise. But in recent studies researchers have shown that big hearts often mean big wins: “Horses with big hearts win more races than those with small hearts,” Buhl said.

Learn more at TheHorse.com/34849.

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**2015 WEVA Congress Heads to Mexico**

The 14th WEVA Congress will take place Oct. 8-10, 2015, in Guadalajara, Mexico. The event, hosted by WEVA and the Association of Mexican Equine Veterinarians, will also include wet labs on Oct. 6 and 7.

Program chair Sandro Barbacini, DVM, is organizing a scientific program featuring more than 40 international speakers, including Jean-Marie Denoix, DVM, PhD, who will perform his popular live ultrasound demonstration; renowned orthopedics expert Sue Dyson, MA, VetMB, PhD, DEO, FRCVS; internal medicine authority Steve Reed, DVM, Dipl. ACVIM; surgeons Eric Parente, DVM, Dipl. ACVS, and Louise Southwood, BVSc, PhD, Dipl. ACVS, ACVECC; reproduction guru Patrick McCue, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACT; and others.

The abstract submission deadline has been extended to Feb. 15. For more information, visit Weva2015Guadalajara.com.

—Gary Nonwood, DVM, WEVA President’s Advisor

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**TRENDING**

**Patting vs. Scratching**

For additional news items, see TheHorse.com/News