Welcome to our winter newsletter! This time we will be discussing colic, feeding for winter weather, new rules about veterinary feed directives, and our yearly dental special. We always enjoy reading your feedback. We can be reached at rockytopvetoffice@gmail.com or on facebook under Rocky Top Veterinary Service.

Thanks,
Britt, Sadie, Kristie, and Maria

**Colic**

The word colic strikes fear into any horse owner’s heart. The term colic does not actually refer to a specific disease; it’s a general term referring to any type of abdominal pain, most commonly originating from the gastrointestinal tract. This is important because there are many types of colic. Some of the more common causes of colic are…

1. **Gas colic** - Accumulation of gas causes sections of the intestines to quickly distend. The pressure within the intestines causes pain and therefore colic. Gas colic is very treatable and usually resolves with pain management and gentle exercise.

2. **Impaction** - Food accumulates in the intestines causing a full or partial obstruction and subsequent pain. Impactions usually occur secondary to decreased water intake, such as when the weather is cold and stormy and horses are unwilling to leave their shelters to get water.

**Clinical Signs**

Colic can present is many ways. Some common signs include depression, rolling, pawing, looking frequently at their sides, posturing as if to urinate without urinating, and unwillingness to eat.
So, you think that your horse is colicking?! What now?

If you can approach your horse safely, gather some information before calling your vet. Take a minute to calmly assess your horse’s level of pain. Is he throwing himself on the ground to roll or is he just mildly uncomfortable? If you are able to take a heart rate and look at your horse’s gum color, do so. It is not critical that you get this information, but it will help give your vet an idea of the severity of the colic. This is particularly helpful when more than one colic call comes in at once! Other questions you might be asked…Has your horse been passing stool? How many piles? What consistency is the stool? What size are the piles? Has your horse been passing gas? Has your horse been drinking water?

Should you give pain medications?
This is a great question to ask when you call your vet. If they are on their way, it is usually best to hold off on pain meds so that a true assessment of pain can be performed. However, Banamine is a great pain medicine to have on hand for a mild colic that you plan to handle yourself or for a more severe colic if your vet is far away.

Myth busting!
Some people think that a colicky horse should be walked constantly, and should not be allowed to lie down. This is actually not true unless they are rolling repeatedly and violently. If your horse is standing or lying down quietly, it is kind to leave them alone.

Things to think about before your horse ever colics…
Colic is often dramatic and is always stressful. It is not an ideal time to have to make major decisions. One thing that every horse owner should decide is whether or not referral is an option for them. When we refer a horse, you trailer them to a hospital such as CSU. Hospitals can better monitor a horse needing intensive care and can perform colic surgery if necessary. You should decide whether referral for a medical colic is something you’d be interested in pursuing, and also whether surgery is an option for your horse. If you keep your horse at a boarding facility, these preferences should be recorded in your horse’s file or posted on his stall door. Hopefully, your horse never colics badly, but if he does then you will be prepared to answer these questions.
Winter weather feeding

It’s cold out! When you look outside, your horses are shivering…what should you do? It’s important to first make sure that your horses have access to shelter so that they can stay dry and out of the wind. Another common way of warming horses up is to feed them extra. Some common choices include a warm mash, hay or alfalfa.

**Warm mash** - Soaking a horse’s normal ration of concentrates or soaking hay cubes is a great way to **slightly increase you horse’s water consumption**. Not many horses will turn down a warm meal on a cold day!

**Concentrates** - Horses do need more calories during cold weather in order to maintain their body temperature. However, **concentrates actually produce less heat than forages** do when they are digested. In addition, horses who are not typically fed grain should not be fed large amounts of grain on a cold day. A sudden increase in concentrates can cause colic.

**Forage** - When hay or alfalfa is digested, the **fermentation process releases heat**. Providing free choice forage to horses during the winter is one of the most effective ways to help horses maintain their body temperatures. As with grain, caution should be used when feeding larger than normal amounts of alfalfa. Because alfalfa is significantly richer than most grass hays, if your horse is not used to it, it may cause colic.

**Salt/Mineral** - All animals should have access to salt and mineral year round, but this is especially important to remember in the winter time when grazing is limited in quantity and quality.

**Water** - Access to water which is not frozen is very important when the weather is cold. Make sure that your **tank heaters** are working properly and aren’t giving off any stray voltage. Even low levels of stray voltage can discourage horses from drinking. Daily electrolytes to encourage water intake is another good practice during winter months, especially during stretches of particularly cold or stormy weather.

Remember! Fuzzy winter coats and winter blankets can disguise a poor body condition. Don’t forget to **monitor your horse’s body condition** throughout the winter. Feel along their ribs, spine, hips, and rump or use a weight tape regularly.
Veterinary Feed Directives

If you raise food animals, then you have probably heard about the veterinary feed directive (VFD), which went into effect on January 1, 2017. Do you find understanding or implementing these new rules confusing? If so, then you are not alone. Here is what you need to know...

What is a VFD?
A VFD is a directive written by a veterinarian specifying the use of feed grade antibiotics for food animals. A VFD is now required by the FDA for all medically important antibiotics administered in feed or water. Antibiotics used in both human and animal health are considered “medically important”. Production uses for feed grade antibiotics which fall under the VFD rule will no longer be accepted. All VFD feed antibiotics will only have indications for treatment and control of disease. No extralabel use is allowed for these antimicrobials. The VFD only affects feed grade antibiotics. The use of injectable antibiotics is not affected. The goal of requiring a VFD is to encourage judicious use of antibiotics in agriculture. Once written, one copy of the VFD will be sent to the feed supplier, one to the producer, and another is kept on file by the veterinarian for 2 years. A VFD can be written to last for up to 6 months. In order to write a VFD, a veterinarian must have a valid veterinary-client-patient-relationship and be licensed in the state in which the animals live.

What is a valid veterinary-client-patient-relationship?
When a valid veterinary client patient relationship exists, a veterinarian will visit the producers operation on a regular basis, giving them a full understanding of the how a producer operates, the type of animals they produce, and the medical condition of these animals. A veterinarian will have worked with the client to discuss common health problems and treatment protocols, and well as protocols for preventative medicine.

If you have been using a product that will fall under this regulation, it should have carried a transitional label last year, warning you of the need for a VFD. In our area, those most likely to be affected are 4H participants feeding medicated feed. Even if you are not directly affected you should be aware of the basics of these regulations.

For a good list of drugs affected, see:
https://ahdc.vet.cornell.edu/programs/NYSCHAP/nysvfrp/vfd.cfm#OTC
For a list of drugs transitioning from over the counter to VFD status, see:
http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/DevelopmentApprovalProcess/ucm482107.htm
http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/DevelopmentApprovalProcess/ucm482106.htm
Dental Special!

February is National Pet Dental Health month! In honor of this, we are again having a dental special throughout the month of February. Save $20 on an equine dental scheduled any time during the month!

Just a reminder, some signs which may indicate that your horse needs a dental…
- Dropping feed when eating
- Head tilt when eating
- Weight loss
- Changes in performance—e.g., unwillingness to accept a bit or resistance to flexing at the poll when riding
- Foul odor from the mouth or nose
- Swelling of the face

For a full article on equine dentals, see last year’s winter newsletter!