

20 April 2020

VITAL INFORMATION REGARDING EXERCISE, VACCINATION AND WELLBEING/WELFARE OF THE HORSE

1. Why exercising horses is vital for the welfare of the horse

Equines are born athletes and require the ability to move freely in their environment in order to maintain proper health. Exercising is an important part of a horse's daily life and is essential for horses that are stabled.

Physical activity increases blood circulation and stimulates gastrointestinal motility, keeping the entire digestive tract in good shape, lessening the chance of torsions, impactions, and intussusceptions that lead to colic. Providing the horse with proper exercise is necessary for adequate circulation, digestion, flexibility, muscle and bone development, and impact their overall health and happiness.

The mechanics of a horse's blood flow, especially in the feet and lower limbs, require regular movement for efficient circulation. Horses that are confined to stalls for long periods of time tend to suffer from swelling of the legs; the swelling is caused when fluids build up (edema) due to poor circulation. Every step a horse takes helps to keep their circulation working by 'pumping' fluid back up the legs. The hoof of the horse has evolved to expand to absorb the downward pressure of the horse (as the hoof touches the ground) and contract to help push fluid upwards again as the hoof leaves the ground. As a minimum form of exercise, 30 to 45 minutes daily walking or trotting is required.

Sedentary horses lose muscle mass and can become insulin resistant. Muscle uses a large amount of glucose for energy; the more muscle mass your horse has, the more glucose transporters are produced, leading to increased insulin sensitivity. Exercise not only burns calories, but reduces insulin resistance. Exercise also helps reduce leptin resistance. It will lower the risk of Laminitis - a very serious equine condition.

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2. Annual vaccinations to be administered by veterinarians

African Horse Sickness (AHS) is one of a number of diseases known to be potentially damaging to the livestock economy. By way of the Animal Diseases Act (Act No. 35 of 1984), AHS has been declared a state-controlled disease, thereby empowering the state to implement measures to control the disease. Horse owners are also required by this law to notify their local state veterinarian of any cases of AHS.

The Act also requires that all equines (horses, donkeys and mules) must be vaccinated at least once a year with an approved AHS vaccine.

Vaccination Protocol

- a) All registered equines in the Republic of South Africa wanting to enter the AHS Control Areas must be vaccinated by a Veterinarian or a specifically authorized Animal Health Technician (AHT) in the employment of the Veterinary Authority, under direct supervision of the State Veterinarian concerned.
- b) Vaccination must be done annually with AHS I and AHS II vaccine.
- c) There must be a minimum of 3 weeks between I and II and the horse may not move into the AHS Control Area less than 60 days after the second vaccination.
- d) All horses must be registered and identified by means of a passport.

3. Seeing to the necessary and essential care of our horses' wellbeing

Mental well-being of horses is vital. The stress of stall confinement and isolation often leads to behavioural problems, consistent with trapping any animal – weaving, stall-walking and circling, pawing, wall-kicking, chewing, head-bobbing, self-biting, and even cribbing – it is generally done to alleviate the pain of an ulcer.

Bottom line

Confining a horse to a stall or small outdoor area without the ability to exercise leads to an animal who is mentally stressed and physically limited. Exercise, walking, grazing, socializing, and freedom to flee from perceived dangers are essential parts of what makes your horse, a horse.

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