



# HEARTLAND EQUINE HEALTH CENTER

YOUR DESTINATION FOR EQUINE HEALTHCARE IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS

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## **HEHC Newsletter - August 2011**

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## **Time for Dentistry?**

Are you wondering if your horse is in need of dental care? The answer to that question may be simple if your horse is losing weight, having trouble chewing, has purulent nasal discharge or a foul odor to his breath. But many horses with oral or dental issues may show only subtle signs of discomfort or no external signs at all. In these cases, the only way to know for sure if the horse needs dental treatment is to have a thorough oral exam under sedation utilizing a full-mouth speculum. A good rule of thumb is: most horses require dental equilibration (commonly called "floating") every two years. Active performance or show horses may need dentistry annually or even more frequently to keep them comfortable and performing at their best.

Regular dentistry allows correction of any malocclusions (such as waves, hooks, or ramps) and removal of sharp edges before they cause more serious problems such as buccal (cheek) ulcers, periodontal disease or tooth root abscesses. Treatment also requires less time and causes less trauma to the sensitive oral tissues when it is performed regularly rather than waiting for obvious signs of trouble before intervening. While other types of oral disease are uncommon in horses, regular oral exams and dentistry allow us to diagnose problems such as tongue injuries, oral tumors and pharyngeal disease earlier—while treatment is more effective and less invasive. So, back to the original question....does YOUR horse need dentistry?

- If we performed a brief oral exam this Spring during a wellness visit and reported that the first cheek teeth were sharp or we could visualize dental pathology, then your horse needs dentistry.
- If it has been more than two years since the last time your horse had teeth floated, then your horse needs dentistry.
- If you have a young horse that you are getting ready to start under saddle or in harness, then he needs dentistry.

Many of us have a lull in our show or trail-riding plans that make mid-summer a great time to get medical procedures such as dentistry taken care of. We can come out to your farm, or you and your horses can visit our clinic's air-conditioned treatment room for dentistry or any other needed medical procedures. Call HEHC (217)793-6111 to schedule an appointment!

## Shopping For Hay

Selecting the right hay is important for maintaining the health of your horse. High-quality forage, either pasture or hay, should make up the bulk of every horse's diet, no matter what the activity level of the horse. The nutritional needs of your horses should be considered when you select hay. Young active horses will have vastly different needs than mature horses that are less active. You should take into consideration the age, stage of development, metabolism, activity level, and any other underlying medical factors when determining the type of hay you will feed.

Most hay can be classified as grass hay, alfalfa hay or grass/alfalfa mix. Alfalfa can be a good option for a broodmare in late gestation/lactation or a high level athlete due to its high energy content, but alfalfa is NOT usually a good choice for the average horse. Feeding alfalfa to the average horse could cause serious problems such as excessive weight gain and founder. On the other hand, if you have a horse that struggles to keep weight on, it could benefit from the extra energy and protein found in alfalfa hay or a grass/alfalfa mix.

No matter what type of hay you end up choosing for your horse, always make sure you inspect your purchase. Choose hay that is soft to the touch. Avoid hay that contains significant amounts of weeds, dirt, trash or debris, or smells moldy, musty, dusty or fermented. If you have trouble finding the type of hay you have determined appropriate for your horse, keep in mind that soaked hay cubes or pellets are an acceptable substitute and come in many varieties such as grass hay, alfalfa hay, or grass/alfalfa mix and can be found at most farm stores. You can also meet some (or all) of your horses' forage requirement with a complete forage-added feed such as Purina Equine Senior® or Horse Chow®.

Once you determine the right hay for your horses' nutritional needs you will be ready to stock up for

winter. Be sure to buy as much hay as you will need for the winter as early as possible to avoid paying premium prices for lower quality hay or even running out of hay before next summer. Short on storage space? Many hay suppliers will store hay for you and deliver it in smaller loads as long as you pay for it up front. If you would like help determining the best type of hay to feed your horses, give us a call at the office to set up a consultation and we'll be happy to help.

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## Bio-Security at Home

The recent EHV-1 outbreak in the Western U.S. serves as a reminder that we should all be taking steps to protect our horses from disease outbreaks all the time, not just after they have begun. While it is impossible to completely eliminate the risk of introducing infectious diseases to your farm, there are a few simple things that all horse owners can do to improve bio-security both on and off the farm.

### On & Around the Farm:

- If borrowing equipment from other farms thoroughly wash and disinfect before using (this applies to tack, blankets, stable supplies and even tractors, trailers, and other farm equipment).
- Work with your veterinarian to develop and administer a herd health protocol that includes at least regular Coggins testing, core vaccinations and a deworming strategy.
- When possible keep horses that travel frequently separated from broodmares, youngsters, and other horses that do not regularly leave your farm.

### At Shows, Trail Rides, and Other Equestrian Events:

- Use only your own equipment. Avoid sharing halters, lead ropes, wheelbarrows, muck forks, tack, etc.

- Feed and water your horse using only your buckets and tubs. Do not allow other horses to eat or drink from your water tubs, hay feeders, etc.
- If possible, stable with at least one empty stall between your horses and other horses.
- Disinfect any equipment that is shared or comes into contact with another horse.
- Talk to your veterinarian about a vaccination protocol to best suit your horse's disease exposure risk.

#### **Acquiring New Horses:**

- Require all horses to be presented with a current negative Coggins test prior to entering your facility.
- Isolate (quarantine) new animals for two to six weeks before introducing them to the herd. Isolation facilities should, at a minimum, not allow any physical contact between horses and should limit/eliminate the ability of horses to pass bodily fluids including saliva and nasal discharges.
- Only handle new/isolated horses after handling other animals on your property.
- Before integrating new horses to your herd administer all necessary vaccinations and other preventive health care measures as recommended by your veterinarian and in accordance with your preventive herd health protocol.

#### **Managing Sick Horses:**

- Work with your veterinarian to develop an appropriate treatment and quarantine protocol.
- Separate the sick animal from the rest of the herd; Tend to the sick animal last, after tending to your healthy animals.
- Thoroughly and carefully wash your hands both before and after treatment. A full

shower may be necessary (after treatment) depending upon the ailment.

- Walk through a disinfecting foot bath before entering and exiting the treatment area.
- Stabling area and tools and equipment used in or around the affected horse should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to other use.

When disease outbreaks do occur, rumors and wild stories spread like wildfire via media reports, e-mail, internet chat rooms and social media groups like Facebook and Twitter. Make sure that the information you use to make decisions about the safety of your farm is from credible sources. The best information is available from veterinary organizations such as the AAEP (American Association of Equine Practitioners), the AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association), the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture - the government agency in charge of monitoring and overseeing disease outbreaks), and your local veterinarian. We receive regular reports on disease outbreaks from the above agencies and the Illinois State Veterinarian. Please contact our office if you have questions about bio-security on your farm.

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### **Hear Ye, Hear Ye: We Do Not Have a Valid Email Address for You!**

18<sup>th</sup> Century: Town crier announces the news.

19<sup>th</sup> Century: Printed newspaper used to disseminate news.

20<sup>th</sup> Century: Newsletters individually sent to clients informing them of the latest news.

21<sup>st</sup> Century: Information sent electronically through e-mail.

Help us join the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Send us your e-mail address so we can send you reminders, newsletters, and breaking news reports electronically.