

Traveling with Your Horse this Summer?

The following information is courtesy Hagyard Equine Medical Institute, one of the sponsors of Festival 2007. Dr. Smith offers some excellent advice for families hauling horses long distances this summer.

Traveling with your horse or pony to any event can be an exciting, rewarding experience. It can also evolve into a catastrophe with a sick or dead horse. Much of the success in keeping your horse or pony healthy depends on the preparation for that trip, some of which needs to start well ahead of time.

We will discuss when to start preparing and what preventative medicine you can prepare with, the weather, feed or nutrition, and what to take along for first aid. Is your trip long or short? What is your horse's disposition when trailering? When do you start preparing for the trip? Loading in a trailer should start at a young age, if possible so you are not disgusted when your pony won't load at the last minute before your trip. The things that we will discuss today take a much shorter time, but with vaccinations it may be several months.

Preventative medicine is always easier and cheaper than treating a disease. Thus, start with proper vaccinations. Always talk with your veterinarian because every situation can be a little different. Check with the show secretary on requirements within the state and what is required by the show grounds. Here are some general recommendations that should apply in most situations to protect you and your horse or pony.

Vaccinations should be done far enough in advance to provide protection and not to interfere with traveling. Sometimes a dose of a vaccination may result in a low grade fever for several days after being vaccinated. This would not be a good time to travel. In addition, most vaccines are not going to provide protection for several weeks after it has been given. If your pony has not received a vaccine before, it may require 1 or 2 additional shots, or boosters, for good coverage from these diseases. Ponies and horses need to be protected against the diseases they are most likely to come in contact with in the course of their travel. At shows, trail rides, etc, the most likely disease they will come in contact with are upper respiratory infections, which can be contagious.

Here is what I would consider on a list for a horse or pony that will be traveling. These vaccines will need to be administered several weeks before traveling.

- Influenza: the modified live vaccine has been shown to be the best for competition horses.
- Rhinomune (Herpes Virus): the modified live vaccines are also recommended for maximum protection (especially this year following outbreaks).
- West Nile: vaccinate before mosquito season. *Check with your veterinarian when the mosquito population appears in your area.*
- Eastern and Western Encephalomyelitis: vaccinate before mosquito season as well. If in the Deep South, I would recommend a booster in the fall.
- Tetanus: although not contagious the tetanus organism may be any place and you want your horse to be protected against this terrible disease.
- Although rabies doesn't often occur in horses, it is a preventable threat with a simple vaccine. Though rare in horses, rabies results in certain death.

There is some indication that immuno regulators may be of value in combating the stress of travel and boosting your pony's immunity. Horses and ponies tend to have difficulty passing manure or becoming impacted when traveling, particularly if they have not been on good pasture. We use mineral oil to prevent impactions for horses traveling over long distances by inserting a naso gastric tube through the nose and into the stomach. Talk to your veterinarian ahead of time to see if this is something they recommend. You may also want to ask about the use of electrolytes before traveling.

When your horse or pony returns home from a show, remember that he or she could be carrying a disease that hasn't shown signs or symptoms. It is important to keep the traveling horse or pony away from the rest of the herd for at least three weeks, if possible, to prevent the spread of any disease they may have picked up on the way home.

Horses are creatures of habit and do better when there isn't a dramatic change in their diet. In fact, dramatic changes to a horse's diet can interfere with digestion and cause colic. Forage is their natural diet, consisting of grass and hay. Monitoring their forage and concentrate similar to that fed at home will help keep your horse or pony healthy. Concentrate should be balanced and ideally contain plenty of fiber. The forage will probably be hay and should be of top quality. *Never feed your horse moldy hay.* The hay should be grass or a grass/ legume mixture. Bring both hay and concentrate from home when possible. This keeps your horse's diet consistent with what they are use to.

Be sure to provide your horse or pony with plenty of fresh water. To encourage drinking for the fickle horse, try adding Jello to the mixture to cover up the new taste of water in a different surrounding. Make sure to test the Jello in the water before you leave! Add Jello to see if they will drink the water they are already use to.

Tranquilizers should only be used if absolutely necessary. Remember, they may be testing for certain medications and tranquilizers. Testing positive for tranquilizers can disqualify you and your horse from the show.

Some trailering tips I would like to add:

- Make sure your trailer is well ventilated. It is imperative for your horse or pony to get plenty of fresh air while on the road.
- Additionally, in the cold winter months make sure you blanket your horse or pony in the trailer if necessary.
- Horses prefer to stand in different positions in the trailer. Make sure you know how your horse or pony rides best before you start out on a long trip. Studies have shown that facing forward in the trailer is the worst, and have shown that heart rate, respiration rate and temperature all go up when facing forward.
- In one study transportation proved to use as much energy as walking. Transportation for a horse is work.
- Horses may lose .5% of their body weight per hour during transportation.
- Weight loss persists for 3-7 days after transport.
- When taking a rest stop, wait to water your horse right before starting on the road again.
- They are more likely to drink then.

It may be a good idea to carry a first aid kit. Consider taking the following:

Banamine, Tranquillizer, Topical antibiotic ointment, Betadine scrub, Cotton/gauze, Bandages, Wound cream, Disposable gloves. On arrival, let your pony rest or if he is anxious, take him on a short walk. Exam him carefully and thoroughly. Wait a few minutes after arrival and take his temperature to make sure it is within normal limits.

Health and shipping requirements, *Talk to your veterinarian well in advance*

Coggins test- coggins are good for one year. This is a test to see if a horse tests positive for EIA or equine infectious anemia. Make sure that you have the test pulled well in advance before leaving. Most states require a current coggins to enter the state and the show grounds. Additionally, you may be required to show a health certificate to travel across state.

Health papers are usually good for thirty days. In certain circumstances, there may be special requirements because of disease outbreaks. Make sure to verify any health requirements in the states you will be traveling through.

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