



EQUINE BOTULISM

What is Equine Botulism?

- Equine Botulism is a disease that is caused by toxins that are produced from the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*. These toxins are so potent that one teaspoon of the toxin is enough to kill 5,000 horses.
- Equine Botulism is a rapidly progressive disease that quickly paralyzes an affected horse's nervous system.
- Unfortunately, this disease is nearly 100% fatal even if it is treated. If Equine Botulism is left untreated, affected horses usually die within 48 to 72 hours as a result of respiratory paralysis.

What Causes Botulism?

- soil (especially muddy conditions)
- contaminated feedstuffs (most people implicate round bales)
- contaminated water sources
- contamination of a puncture wound with *Clostridium botulinum*
- contamination of a foal's umbilical stump (the cause of Shaker Foal Syndrome)

What are the Signs of Equine Botulism?

- It is hard to diagnose Equine Botulism initially because it looks like many other diseases
- The onset of clinical signs can range from 12 hours to several days (depending on how much of the toxin was ingested)

Signs:

- initially, horses have tremors and muscle weakness
- later, the horse may appear to be colicking
- the signs more specific to botulism include: severe loss of tongue and tail tone, along with difficulty eating and swallowing

Note: an inability to retract the tongue is a sign of botulism

Are there Effective Treatments for Botulism?

- If a horse has been diagnosed very quickly after the onset of clinical signs, there is a chance that the horse can be saved. Treatment is expensive and may cost upwards of \$5,000.00.

Can Botulism be Prevented?

- YES!!! Preventing equine botulism is simple and safe through the administration of a series of vaccinations. Please contact our office to set up your first year boosters (three) or your annual shots.
- Preventing botulism is the simple, inexpensive and effective alternative to the predominantly futile efforts to treat an infected horse.

Is Your Horse at Risk for Botulism?

- Researchers have sampled soil throughout the United States and found botulinum to be a greater concern east of the Mississippi River, especially in the Northeast, Midwest and along the Atlantic Coast.
- Due to the increasing movement of horses from low risk areas to areas of higher risk, and of feedstuffs, the risk of botulism is a threat to a greater number of horses throughout the country.

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