

## **Spring 2003 Comstock Health Chronicle**

### **Dental Facts**

Horses' teeth are slowly worn away over their lifetime due to the abrasive nature of the equine diet. Fortunately, horses' teeth have about 4 inches of reserve crown imbedded in the skull that erupts over the horse's life to replace the tooth that has been worn away.

The average lifespan of a horse's tooth is about 25 years. It has been calculated that on average, a horse will wear away about 0.16 inches of tooth each year. At that rate, a 4 inch tooth will last about 25 years.

Horses' teeth do not wear evenly. The lower jaw of the horse is narrower than the upper jaw. The outside edges of the upper teeth and the inside edges of the lower teeth form sharp points that must be removed to allow pain free chewing. In addition, horses with abnormal bites or horses that have not had regular dental care can develop more serious abnormalities such as hooks, waves, and ramps.

Regular dental care can extend the life of your horse's teeth by early identification of problems and correction of these abnormalities before they lead to uneven wear of the remaining tooth.

Overly aggressive dental care can shorten the life of your horse's teeth. The use of motorized dental instruments has become very popular in the last several years. These tools are very useful in correcting major dental abnormalities. However, overzealous use of these instruments removes valuable crown that the horse will need for chewing when he is in his golden years.

You are a critical factor in helping us to maintain your horse's dental health. While dental exams are usually performed as part of your spring and fall exams, oral examination in an unsedated horses that have not had regular dental care can develop more serious abnormalities such as hooks, waves, or ramps.

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### **Rabies**

Two foxes in Washoe Valley were diagnosed with rabies earlier this year. As of the end of 2002, no other cases of rabies have been identified. However, the state veterinarian has recommended that all horses in the area be vaccinated against this disease.

Rabies is a fatal neurologic disease of many mammals (including humans and horses). Horses can be contagious before they show signs of the disease. Protection against rabies in horses is achieved with a single vaccine. Please let us know if you would like to vaccinate your horse against rabies when you sign up for a vaccination clinic.

### **West Nile Virus**

We believe that the West Nile Virus will hit Nevada this year. This virus causes neurologic disease in birds, humans, and horses. The disease is carried from birds to humans and horses by mosquitoes.

Fortunately, there is a vaccine to protect your horses. We are recommending this vaccine to all of our clients and are starting our vaccination clinics early this year to be sure that all horses are adequately protected before mosquito season. Full protection is not obtained until 2 weeks after the booster vaccine in horses that are vaccinated for the first time. If your horse has not been previously vaccinated against West Nile Virus, be sure to sign up for one of the early clinics in your area so that your horses can be fully protected when the first mosquitoes emerge.