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## **Rattlesnake Toxoid Vaccination For Horses**

After many years of development, a vaccination designed to minimize the effects of rattlesnake bite in horses has been released. Red Rock Biologicals, the vaccine distributor, has had a similar vaccine available for many years for use in dogs, which appears to be well tolerated and fairly effective. Currently (late 2010), the license for the equine vaccine is conditional, as efficacy testing is still ongoing.

Snakebite is a serious problem in many parts of our county. We see several snakebites every year, and they are extremely painful for the horse, extremely upsetting to the owner, expensive to treat, and occasionally result in permanent problems, and rarely, death of the horse. A vaccine to help minimize these problems is a welcome addition to our armamentarium, and many horses will likely benefit from it, but its use may not be appropriate or indicated for every horse.

The vaccine is expensive (it will cost \$46 / dose, and will require an initial series of three doses). It will not *eliminate* the effects of rattlesnake envenomation, but is expected to lessen the severity of symptoms. Until the vaccine has been in use for at least a year, we will not know how common adverse reactions may be.

Even with all those limitations, however, we will be recommending its use for horses in high-risk environments. Horses kept mainly in stalls and ridden mainly in arenas probably should not be vaccinated with this vaccine. Horses kept in pastures and ridden on trails and in the backcountry probably should be vaccinated, especially if the pasture has many elements of an environment favorable to snakes, such as rocks, trees, complex fence lines, water tanks with space underneath, and other such features.

As always, we would like to discuss the use of this, and all other vaccines, as part of a vaccination program designed individually for your horses, taking into account your unique circumstances and risk factors. Please e-mail or call, or we can discuss at the time of your appointment.