

## Vaccinating the Horse

Horses have a long history of supporting human activity by supplying transportation and providing pleasure through sporting activities. The majority of the estimated 4,000 horses in Jamaica are primarily performance animals operating in sports (racing, polo, equestrian activities), tourism (trail-riding), transportation (farming and policing) and therapeutic riding activities. Additionally, equine blood is a useful diagnostic resource for laboratories servicing human health and as such a few horses are maintained exclusively to support this activity.

Regardless of a horse's role, a vaccination programme in the Jamaican context should target the specific diseases Tetanus (lockjaw), Equine Influenza (Equine Flu) and Equine Viral Rhinopneumonitis (EVR). Horses being imported to the island also should be vaccinated against Eastern and Venezuelan Equine Encephalitis. West Nile Virus vaccination is not mandatory locally but is practiced in other territories from which horses are imported.

Jamaica's race horses are regulated through the Jamaica Racing Commission which has stringent vaccination requirements because of the high demands placed on these animal athletes. As such, horses which are not immunized according to requirements are not allowed entry to the racetrack or to participate in racing at Caymanas Park. Horses at the track should be vaccinated every 120 days against Equine flu and EVR, after an initial inoculation/booster combination starting at 6 months old, coinciding with weaning at the breeding farms. Tetanus vaccinations are also required. All vaccinations must be done and certified by a veterinarian.

Vaccination against these diseases is also needed in breeding operations but with lower frequency depending on the individual animal and the level of risk. Other horses should be vaccinated at least twice-yearly against flu and EVR and annually against Tetanus.

It is important to recognize that while vaccinations are protective, they do not confer immediate or complete protection against disease. Their success may be impacted by other disease-promoting factors such as poor nutrition, parasites, overcrowding, and unsanitary or high stress environments.