🐴 Equine Health Handout: Understanding Your Horse's Vaccinations

Maintaining a consistent and appropriate vaccination schedule is crucial for protecting your horse from serious, potentially fatal, and contagious diseases.

This handout explains the core components of some common equine vaccines and why they are vital, especially for horses in the Pacific Northwest (PNW).

🗓️ The Importance of Yearly Boosters

Vaccines work by stimulating the horse's immune system to recognize and fight off a specific pathogen.

1. **Waning Immunity:** Over time, the protective immune response created by the vaccine naturally decreases (wanes).
2. **Sustained Protection:** The **yearly booster** serves as a reminder to the immune system, quickly increasing the antibody levels back to a protective concentration. Without this booster, your horse's immunity can drop to a level where they are susceptible to infection and severe disease.
3. **Risk Management:** Vaccinations are the most effective way to reduce the risk of your horse contracting a serious disease, reducing the severity of illness if they are exposed, and protecting the greater equine community.

Always consult with your veterinarian to create a tailored vaccination program based on your horse's age, use, travel, and local disease risk in the Pacific Northwest.

🌲 Vaccination and the Pacific Northwest (PNW)

The Pacific Northwest (including Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia) has specific environmental factors that emphasize the need for vigilant vaccination.

- **Core Diseases are Everywhere:** Core diseases like **Tetanus** (soil-borne) and **Rabies** (wildlife reservoirs like bats and raccoons) are present throughout the PNW. Horses are at risk simply by existing outdoors.
- **Mosquito-Borne Threats: West Nile Virus (WNV)** and **Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE/WEE)** are transmitted by mosquitoes, which thrive in warmer weather and standing water. Cases of WNV are consistently reported across the region, making the annual booster essential before the start of mosquito season.

- **Potomac Horse Fever (PHF) Risk:** PHF is considered a **risk-based vaccine** for many areas, but it is endemic in certain areas of the PNW, particularly those near streams, rivers, or standing water where the required aquatic insects live. If your horse spends time near these environments, annual PHF vaccination is highly recommended.
- **High Commingling Diseases: Equine Influenza (Flu/EIV), Equine Herpesvirus (Rhino/EHV), and Strangles** are easily spread via nose-to-nose contact, shared equipment, or human contact. For PNW horses that travel for shows, trail rides, or move between barns, keeping up-to-date on these risk-based vaccines is the primary way to prevent outbreaks.

Understanding the Vaccines

Vetera Gold (Multivalent Core Vaccine)

- **What's in it:** A combination of inactivated viruses and toxoids for West Nile Virus (WNV), Eastern and Western Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE/WEE), Tetanus, Equine Herpesvirus (EHV-1 & EHV-4), and Equine Influenza (EIV).
- **Why it's important:** It provides broad-spectrum protection against multiple life-threatening diseases in one shot. Tetanus can be contracted through any simple wound, while WNV and Encephalomyelitis are devastating neurological diseases.

Rabies

- **What's in it:** Inactivated Rabies virus.
- **Why it's important:** Rabies is a 100% fatal neurological disease. Because it is "zoonotic" (can be passed to humans), it is a major public health concern. Horses are typically infected through the bite of a wild animal like a bat or skunk.

Potomac Horse Fever (PHF)

- **What's in it:** Inactivated *Neorickettsia risticii* bacteria.
- **Why it's important:** Prevents PHF, which causes high fever, severe diarrhea, and a high risk of life-threatening laminitis (founder). Horses catch this by accidentally eating aquatic insects (like caddisflies) that carry the bacteria.

Strangles

- **What's in it:** Either purified bacterial antigens (injectable) or live-attenuated *Streptococcus equi* bacteria (intranasal).
- **Why it's important:** Strangles is highly contagious and causes painful abscesses in the lymph nodes of the throat. While usually not fatal, it can lead to long, expensive barn quarantines and secondary complications.