**Tetanus**

Tetanus is a disease of horses, cattle, sheep, goats and, of course, humans. In horses, in our practice, we see two or three cases a year. That may not seem a lot when you consider the total number of horses, but it is a particularly horrible disease that is easily avoided by vaccination.

Tetanus is a bacterial disease caused by the bacterium *Clostridium tetani*, a common soil inhabitant, contaminating a wound. Sheep and cattle most commonly get it following rubber ring castration. In horses, deep penetrating wounds are the most common but even a foot abscess can provide the right conditions. Sometimes when tetanus is diagnosed, the owner has no prior knowledge of a wound, but there always has to have been a wound. It is not contagious.

The clinical signs of tetanus are quite characteristic as the toxin, produced by the bacteria, affects the nervous system. Muscle spasms cause a rigid ‘saw horse’ type stance. Muscle spasms also affect the head, hence the old name ‘lock jaw’, forming a grimaced appearance and prolapse of both third eyelids. As the disease progresses and the spasms become worse, it becomes difficult for the affected animal to stand. Young generally progress faster through the stages of disease. As it is not contagious, we normally only ever see single cases in horses, but numbers of unvaccinated calves and lambs can get it following docking.

If diagnosed early, in mild cases, treatment can be successful but it is protracted and expensive, so euthanasia is often the most humane option.

**Vaccination** against tetanus, with **Tetanus Toxoid,** will reduce the likelihood of disease significantly and avoid the heartache of seeing your horse go through this cruel disease. The primary vaccination for tetanus toxoid is given, and a secondary vaccination four weeks later. The third vaccination is given a year later, with a booster every four to five years. Do not confuse **Tetanus Antitoxin** with the vaccine. Tetanus antitoxin is used when there is already a wound in an unvaccinated animal and provides only very short-term protection. Tetanus antitoxin is also commonly administered to lambs at docking.

If you wish to know more about this disease or enquire about vaccination costs etc. phone the clinic or e-mail admin@vetsonriverbank.nz