

***The Equine Veterinarian and Equine Oral Health, Part 1***  
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Equine oral health is a very important area of herd health and should be part of an annual wellness program. A veterinarian trained in dentistry techniques can perform an oral exam, diagnose disorders of the mouth and teeth, perform treatments, prescribe medications and schedule recheck exams. The veterinary dental record is used to monitor progress and success of prescribed treatments. All are required to maintain a healthy equine mouth.

A trained veterinary dentist is one who has obtained postgraduate equine dentistry instruction and has developed the skills necessary to have acceptable judgment and competence in the field of dentistry. The practice of equine dentistry requires considerable skill, knowledge and expertise. Veterinarians have available to them many opportunities to further educate themselves in dentistry through continuing education lectures, wet labs, and in-depth seminars taught by leaders in the field. Seminars and wet-labs allow fellow veterinarians to discuss new procedures and science-based research in the fields of medicine and dentistry. The trained veterinary dentist has received the most up-to-date information and education so they may perform excellent equine dentistry and care for the horse's mouth.

A veterinary dentist will address the overall health of the horse before examining the horse's mouth. A thorough physical exam and history will be taken prior to any dental work. The history may reveal insight into nutritional needs, health needs, behavior issues, and training problems that can be addressed or investigated during the dental exam. The dental exam will include adequate sedation, proper restraint, the use of dental tools, and radiology to diagnose diseases of the mouth. The dental exam evaluates the lips, incisors, canine teeth, premolars, molars, oral cavity and nasal sinuses. The physical exam, history, and dental exam are important parts of a wellness program.

Horses of all ages will benefit from annual oral exams. Problems such as retained caps, tooth eruption disorders, periodontal disease, malocclusions, tooth fractures, and apical tooth abscesses can be identified early and treated medically by a trained veterinary dentist. A veterinary dentist should be involved in the annual care of the horse's oral cavity.

Be sure to read our December newsletter where I will be discussing developmental tooth disorders of the growing horse.