

ANTIBIOTIC USE IN HORSES: Changing Expectations

Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem.

- Antibiotics are essential to treat bacterial infections.
- Antibiotic resistance happens when bacteria defend themselves against the effects of antibiotics.
- Antibiotics do not work when bacteria are resistant.
- Widespread use of antibiotics in health care and veterinary medicine adds to the problem of resistance.

We must improve how we use antibiotics in equine medicine.

- Resistant infections are becoming more common in small and large animal veterinary medicine, often with limited treatment options.
- To improve the problem of antibiotic resistance, we must reduce the unnecessary use of antibiotics for horses.

Viral infections do not respond to antibiotics.

- Horses with nasal discharge or cough (including heaves) are often affected by viral infections, not bacterial infections.
- Just like the common cold in people, most of these viral respiratory infections will get better within a week without antibiotics.
- Talk to your veterinarian about non-antibiotic options to improve your horse's comfort and reduce clinical signs of illness.
- If your horse's signs worsen or do not improve in three days (persistent fever, lack of appetite), contact your veterinarian for an examination and to discuss whether antibiotics are warranted.
- Young foals with fever, nasal discharge, and cough are more likely to have a bacterial infection.

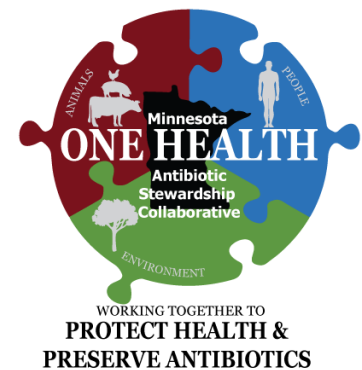
Antibiotics are not always needed for small cuts or wounds.

- If you have antibiotics at home, do not use them without contacting your veterinarian.
- Clean debris from the wound and keep it clean until you can discuss the situation with your veterinarian.

Antibiotic use is not without risk.

- Antibiotic therapy can trigger diarrhea in horses, and severe cases might be life-threatening.
- Use of antibiotics can also contribute to carriage of resistant bacteria on a horse's body or development of a resistant infection.

[Minnesota One Health Antibiotic Stewardship Collaborative](http://www.health.state.mn.us/onehealthabx)
www.health.state.mn.us/onehealthabx



Antibiotic-resistant infections are difficult and expensive to treat.

- Common antibiotics often do not work for these infections.
- Before treating, your veterinarian might recommend a bacterial culture to determine which antibiotic will work best.

Horses and people share more than hugs.

- Resistant bacteria can spread among horses, other animals, and people.
- Adults and children should always wash their hands after handling animals.

Dispose of leftover drugs in a pharmacy or law enforcement take-back box to keep them from ending up in the environment.



This fact sheet was created by University of Minnesota, Minnesota Boards of Animal Health and Veterinary Medicine, and Minnesota Department of Health.