

The Importance of USDA-Accredited Vets

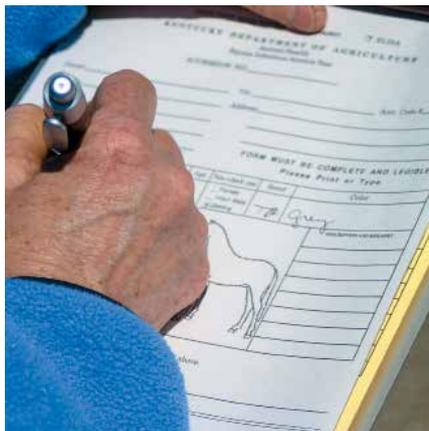
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In 1921 the USDA established the veterinary accreditation program so private practitioners could assist federal veterinarians in controlling animal diseases. The USDA could not monitor our nation's horses for emerging or foreign animal diseases or fulfill the regulatory requirements for interstate and international movement of horses without these accredited equine practitioners' help.

Today's National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP) is administered nationally, but authorization to perform accredited work is granted on a state-by-state basis. Creating a national system has helped the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) standardize the accreditation procedures and requirements, allowing for more uniform administration of the program.

So how does the program work? Accredited equine practitioners examine your horses and complete interstate certificates of veterinary inspection or ICVIs (often referred to as health certificates) when your horses travel interstate. These qualified individuals have a complete understanding of the process and know the requirements of horses' destination states. Under the new Federal Animal Disease Traceability Rule, the ICVI is "... an official document issued by a Federal, State or Tribal Animal Health Official, or accredited veterinarian for the animals that are being shipped interstate." On a much more complex scale, the accredited equine practitioner is also needed when you ship horses internationally.

Should a single equine patient exhibit clinical signs consistent with those of a potentially catastrophic foreign animal disease, such as African horse sickness, accredited equine practitioners immediately



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Did you know your horse's Coggins test requires a federally accredited veterinarian's signature?

notify federal and state officials so diagnosis, quarantine, and eradication efforts can begin if necessary and as soon as possible. Regarding your horse's Coggins test, the federal and most states' equine infectious anemia (EIA) laboratory test submission forms require the signature of a "federally accredited veterinarian."

With the September 2001 terrorist attacks fresh in our minds and the incursions of several foreign animal diseases (including West Nile virus in horses) into the United States in which accredited veterinarians played key roles in the "front line" of diagnosis and treatment, many national veterinary organizations called for a strengthening of the NVAP. The Animal Health Safeguarding Review of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) cited a need to "re-design and upgrade the NVAP" and suggested that "... the accreditation program be the core for emergency preparedness and the response plan."

The USDA responded, and in 2010 the NVAP unveiled several enhancements.

Three are especially important to horse owners. The first enhancement is the establishment of two accreditation categories: Category I and II. Equine practitioners seeking accreditation fall into Category II, which requires more extensive training than Category I. The second enhancement is mandatory supplemental training every three years for accreditation renewal. Supplemental training comes in the form of educational modules available on the Internet and at veterinary conferences. Modules specifically pertaining to horses include preparing equine international health certificates, determining equine fitness to travel, and detecting equine foreign animal diseases. Regular renewal assures that NVAP has the most recent contact information to be used in emergency or disease outbreak situations. The third enhancement is accreditation specialization, or the establishment of a "qualified accredited veterinarian" (QAV) status for Category II-accredited veterinarians. In the future, accredited equine practitioners with QAV status will be able to perform official and specialized testing on your horse for diseases such as contagious equine metritis on the USDA's behalf.

If you need an accredited equine veterinarian, search "NVAP" in your web browser or go to www.aphis.usda.gov/nvap and then select the second link: If You Are Trying to Locate an Accredited Veterinarian. 🐾

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Todd Behre, DVM, PMP, has been the Coordinator of USDA's National Veterinary Accreditation Program for seven years and lives in Maryland with his wife and four dogs. An equine practitioner since 1987, Behre's part-time practice is now limited to equine dentistry.

This opinion column is for topics of importance to the horse industry. If there is a topic you want covered, or if you'd like to submit an article for possible inclusion, contact Stephanie L. Church, Editor-in-Chief, The Horse, PO Box 919003, Lexington, KY 40591-9003; schurch@TheHorse.com.

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