



## **Clinical Guidelines for Veterinarians Treating the Performance Horse (2026)**

### **Introduction**

Performance horses compete in a wide range of athletic activities and a majority of AAEP members provide care to this type of horse.

The AAEP recognizes that veterinarians need to be responsive to various discipline demands and that this may influence the ways in which they practice. With this in mind the AAEP recommends following three primary criteria when practicing sports medicine and providing other medical management to performance horses:

- 1) The health and welfare of the horse should always come first.
- 2) Practice evidence-based medicine.
- 3) When applicable follow the rules of the authority under which the horses are competing.

*\*Evidence-based medicine integrates clinical expertise, patient needs, and the best research evidence in the decision-making process for patient care.*

Equine veterinarians are trained to evaluate and manage performance-limiting problems. When actively involved in the care of a horse, they can provide expertise effective in preventing injuries resulting from training or competition and can help prolong a horse's career. In conjunction with a physical exam the judicious use of therapeutic techniques and medications, coupled with good management, is at the core of successful veterinary intervention.

The mission of the AAEP is to improve the health and welfare of the horse, to further the professional development of its members and to provide resources and leadership for the benefit of the equine industry. Please find the following statements on pertinent topics as guidelines set forth by the AAEP.

### **Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship**

The Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) is the basis for interaction among veterinarians, their clients, and their patients. It is required for proper treatment of the horse and for medication prescriptions. A VCPR exists when all of the following conditions have been met:

- The veterinarian has assumed responsibility for making the clinical judgments regarding the health of the horse and the need for medical treatment and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's instructions.
- The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the horse to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the horse. This means that the veterinarian has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the horse by virtue of an examination of the horse, or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the horse is kept.
- The veterinarian is readily available for follow up evaluations regarding specific treatments including arranging for emergency coverage if needed.
- The veterinarian is responsible for maintaining Patient Records.

Reference: [VCPR: The Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship](#)

### **Infectious Disease Control**

Management of infectious disease at competitions and horse sales is a high priority for the general health of the horse. Practicing veterinarians and regulatory veterinarians should work together with competition management to identify index cases of infectious disease and provide a plan, including an isolation area, for containing an outbreak and managing affected horses in order to protect the population at large. The AAEP Guidelines for Infectious Disease Control and the [Equine Disease Communications Center](#) serve as good references.

### **Drug Compounding**

Legal drug compounding requires a valid VCPR. A compounded medication can only be used when there is not an equivalent FDA approved medication available. Off label (extra label) medication is the use of a FDA-approved product for a non-equine species that is used (off label) in the horse. It should be noted that the use of compounded drugs in a highly regulated competitive environment should be discouraged due to the variability of therapeutic levels and detection times. The AAEP Guidelines for Drug Compounding are a good reference for the legal and ethical use of medications in horses.

### **Documentation of Veterinary Procedures**

All medical treatments and procedures performed on horses in competition or training should be documented in the horse's medical record. One medical record should be kept for each horse and this should be available, with the owner's or owner's representative's permission, to all veterinarians treating the horse. Medical records should include the results of the examination, a working diagnosis and specific treatments including dosages and routes of administration of medications. Documentation of the use of all prescription drugs should conform at a minimum to the requirements of the applicable state's veterinary practice act and requires a valid VCPR.