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Preparing Horses for Winter

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Topics: [Horses](#)

It's autumn and that means it's time to start preparing for winter--which includes getting your horses prepared for the colder weather, too. The American Youth Horse Council reminds every horse owner or caretaker that cold, wet weather brings additional considerations for the well-being of our equines.

Food and Water

Forage for Heat and Health: Digesting food is the horse's most effective source of heat. Cold weather increases the horse's calorie requirements; make sure to adjust quantity accordingly. And, as pasture quality declines or you transition your horse to hay, consider supplementing with concentrates containing minerals and vitamins.

Water: Horses need water year-round for healthy digestion. Horses can't get the necessary amounts of water solely from eating snow, so ensure your horse has ready access to nonfrozen water at all times.

Teeth: Teeth in poor condition will prevent the horse from getting adequate calories and nutrition to keep his weight stable during the cold winter months. Have teeth attended to now so the horse doesn't have to play nutritional catch-up during or immediately after the winter.

Bodily Comfort:

Woolly Coat: The horse's coat is designed to keep him warm. Let it grow and thicken naturally to provide your horse with nature's intended insulation.

Shelter: Even a luxurious natural coat will lose insulating loft if it gets wet, and wind can strip a horse's body heat. Provide shelter at all times that allows for reprieve from the rain, snow and wind.

Extra Insulation: In cold climates, a clipped horse will probably need a blanket, as might older horses or those in poor health. But a wet blanket (from weather or the horse's own sweat) can be just as useless as a wet hair coat. Provide a blanket that is waterproof and breathable, and remove the blanket often to check that the horse is maintaining proper body weight and his coat for skin and hair condition.

Health Matters:

Vaccinations: Check with your veterinarian about fall vaccinations, especially for the horse still exposed

to others outside his regular herd. Keeping your horse properly vaccinated will help keep him healthy through the cold winter.

Parasite Control: Maintain a regular deworming plan. After the first heavy frost, use a product that kills bot larvae.

Hooves: Keep up with hoof care. Hooves continue to grow throughout the winter. If possible, let the horse go barefoot for the winter for safer traction and to avoid snow build-up that can cause sole bruising. If barefoot is not an option, discuss options for providing your horse with better traction with your farrier.

Information courtesy of the AAEP's horse-health Web site, www.myhorsematters.com.