

Alpaca/Llama Herd Health

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Alpacas and llamas have become a much more common site on the hills of southwest VA over the past several years. From guard llamas to pet alpacas to prized breeding stock, some good basic management is essential for keeping healthy camelids. The following is a brief discussion on routine vaccinations and parasite control. Each situation is unique and recommendations can be made based on a specific farm with specific goals.

Another item worth mentioning is passive immunity. This is the immunity that a cria receives when it ingests good colostrum soon after birth. Ideally, a cria should receive at least 10% of its body weight in colostrum in the first 24 hours of life. The initial meal will hopefully be within 6 hours after arrival into this world. Crias are born with a naïve immune system, little ability to regulate their own body temperature and with very little glucose reserves, so if no progress is made in the first couple hours after birth, give us a call for advice. To make certain a cria received adequate passive immunity, IgG (antibodies from colostrum) levels can be measured once the cria reaches 24 hrs of age.

If these general recommendations are followed, you'll have a healthier herd. Contact us to make an appointment if you need more specific herd recommendations or if you have any other questions.

Vaccinations

C, D & T – This vaccine protects against certain diseases caused by the Clostridial bacteria including diseases of the intestinal tract and the well known tetanus. All animals should receive an initial primary vaccination followed by a booster in about a month, then a booster every year. Several vaccine types are available with Vision CD&T and Bar-Vac CD&T the most commonly used. Other clostridial vaccines which include blackleg (Covexin-8, etc.) will be used on some farms when indicated.

Timing of the vaccination will vary with different management situations. The most effective way to provide good immunity throughout life is to give dams a booster 4-6 weeks prior to birthing. This will ideally ensure protection of the newborn, as long as he/she receives adequate colostrum soon after birth. The cria can then receive its initial vaccine at about 3 months of age and a booster 1 month later. If the dam does not receive a booster prior to birthing, the cria should be vaccinated at a younger age.

Rabies – The other routinely used vaccination in camelids is Rabies. Rabies is not common in llamas and alpacas but certainly can occur. The most convincing reason to administer rabies vaccination is the potential for human exposure and subsequent fatal disease. Just like other vaccinations, rabies is given with an initial dose then booster in a month followed by vaccinations every one to three years depending on the farm.

Other vaccines including Leptospirosis or respiratory vaccines may be used in certain situations if these diseases pose a threat on your farm.

Parasite Control

The most important thing to remember about parasite control is to monitor fecal egg counts to determine if your plan is working. The only way to know the level of parasites in the herd is to look for them. Another important point is that good basic hygiene including manure removal and prevention of over-crowding will go a long way in preventing severe parasite problems.

Worms – There are basically two types of worms necessary to control: Meningeal worm (deer worm) and gastrointestinal worms. The deer worm (*P. Tenuis*) is carried by white-tailed deer with the intermediate host being snails or slugs. Affected llamas/alpacas will usually exhibit signs of spinal cord trauma including muscle weakness, incoordination, and/or paralysis. The gastrointestinal worms may cause diarrhea but most importantly will cause anemia due to the parasite ingesting blood.

Due to the prevalence of deer in our area, scheduled deworming is necessary to prevent meningeal worm. The most commonly used dewormer is doramectin (Dectomax) given once a month. Control of GI parasites is much different due to the development of worm resistance to commonly use dewormers. The most practical advice given is to check fecal samples to determine the worm egg shedding before and after deworming. With this information, one can tailor deworming protocols to a particular farm – what drug to use and how frequent to use it.

Coccidia – This is a protozoal parasite that affects the gastrointestinal tract and in some cases can cause severe disease and death. The most commonly talked about coccidia is *Eimeria macusanesis* (E. mac) which has been identified as a particularly pathogenic coccidian. Routine fecal checks is again the best means to identify and control coccidia issues. Drugs for coccidia control include amprolium (Corid), sulfadimethoxine (Albon), and ponazuril (Marquis). Specific recommendations on when and how to use these can be made on a farm-to-farm basis.

Hemoparasites – It is at least worth mentioning a less common parasite identified in camelids and that is *Mycoplasma haemolama*, better known as EPE. This is essentially a parasite of red blood cells that tend to affect stressed or immunocompromised animals. The disease causes weak, anemic animals and if left untreated, may result in death.