



Do a Livestock Dental Check

Dental care is essential to healthy livestock, especially horses. Use National Pet Dental Health Month as your cue to check the teeth of all your farm animals.

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Photo by Leslie Potter

Use National Pet Dental Health Month in February as a reminder to have your livestock's teeth examined as well. February is National Pet Dental Health Month, and as you take your farm dog or barn cat to the veterinarian to make sure their chompers are in good working order, don't forget to have the teeth of your large farm animals checked out as well.

"Any animal with teeth can have dental health problems," says Anna Wildgrube, DVM, of Faribault Veterinary Clinic in Faribault, Minn. "A lot of livestock dental issues come from teeth not growing in straight or as the result of livestock chewing on something they shouldn't, like fences or gates."

While the dental health of any livestock species is something that you should have checked out during regular veterinary exams, special attention tends to be given to horses' dental health, as they are companion animals and dental problems can lead to performance and behavioral issues.

"Some people think that problems in the horse's mouth only occur to older animals that are quidding or having trouble maintaining their condition, but young animals should have dental exams as well," Wildgrube says.

Adult horses' teeth can be checked yearly during annual checkups or vaccinations, while younger horses around 2½ to 5 years old that are shedding their teeth should be examined twice a year. During routine care, veterinary dentists will smooth sharp enamel points on the horse's teeth—called floating—as well as correct other dental problems like malocclusions.

You may also want to consider having a full dental examination performed on your horse if you notice performance issues in your riding horse or other signs of poor dental health.

Some signs of dental health problems you can look for in your horse are irregular bumps or lumps around the horse's face, an odor coming from the horse's nose or mouth, weight loss despite a complete diet, or difficulty chewing. If the horse is tipping its head sideways when it chews or dropping balled up hay or grain, it might need a dental exam.

Wildgrube notes that even traditionally "easy keeping" horses need regular dental exams. While some horses display signs of dental problems, others don't. If a horse has a dental condition that goes unnoticed, it can cause ulcers or erosion in the mouth, which can be very painful for the horse.

In addition to having your horse's teeth checked regularly, you can help combat dental health problems in your horse by feeding it properly.

"Horses are grazing animals, and owners should provide plenty of hay or turnout time for their horse to eat," Wildgrube says.

For more information on horse dental care, read [Avoiding Dental Problems](#) on [HorseChannel.com](#).