

Camelid care essentials: Managing common diseases and disorders

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Abstract

This presentation aims to highlight crucial aspects of managing common diseases and disorders in camelids, focusing on llamas and alpacas. With their unique physiological traits and health requirements, camelids present a distinct set of challenges in veterinary care. By understanding and addressing these challenges, veterinarians can improve the health and welfare of these animals. The conditions covered include Munge, tooth root abscesses, neurological diseases, choke, arthritis, GI obstructions, mites, and intestinal parasites.

Key words: camelids, munge, tooth root abscesses, neurological diseases, choke, arthritis, GI obstructions, mites, intestinal parasites

Understanding camelids

Camelids, including llamas and alpacas, are pseudo-ruminants with a specialized digestive system comprising 3 stomach compartments. They exhibit unique blood characteristics, such as oval-shaped red blood cells, essential for oxygen transport in dehydrated states. Their thick fleece and skin offer insulation against extreme weather, while their reproductive system requires specific management due to their status as induced ovulators. Recognizing the social and behavioral traits of camelids, including their stress responses, is crucial for effective handling and treatment.

Basic health parameters

- Temperature: 99.0 - 101.5°F
- Pulse: 48 - 60 bpm
- Respiration: 12 - 30 breaths per minute
- Ruminations: Approximately 2-3 per minute
- Lifespan: Alpacas: 15-20+ years, Llamas: 15-25+ years

Disease management in camelids

Munge

- Diagnosis: Characterized by thickened, crusty skin with alopecia. A skin biopsy confirms the diagnosis.
- Treatment: Clean affected areas with a chlorhexidine scrub and apply a 50:50 mixture of hydrocortisone and triple antibiotic ointment.
- Prevention: Regular grooming and maintaining clean living conditions to minimize exposure to irritants.

Tooth root abscesses

- Diagnosis: Physical examination and imaging. Commonly affects mandibular teeth, often due to rough forage or injury.
- Treatment: Antibiotic therapy (e.g., florfenicol, ceftiofur) and surgical intervention if necessary.
- Prevention: Regular oral examinations and providing appropriate forage to minimize damage to teeth.

Neurological Diseases

- Diagnosis: Comprehensive neurological exam assessing reflexes, coordination, and mental status.
- Treatment: Administration of thiamine, anti-inflammatory medications, antibiotics, and supportive care.
- Prevention: Early detection through regular health assessments and prompt treatment of symptoms.

Choke

- Diagnosis: Based on history of feeding behavior and clinical signs such as coughing and excessive drooling.
- Treatment: Sedation, administration of anti-inflammatories, and careful use of an orogastric tube to relieve obstruction.
- Prevention: Slow feeding practices and soaking hay pellets prior to feeding.

Arthritis

- Diagnosis: History, physical examination and palpation of joints.
- Treatment: NSAIDs (e.g., meloxicam) and gabapentin for pain management.
- Prevention: Regular veterinary exams, weight management and early intervention.

GI Obstructions

- Diagnosis: Clinical signs of colic and discomfort, confirmed by palpation and diagnostic imaging.
- Treatment: Non-surgical management with warm water, electrolytes and laxatives; surgical intervention if necessary.
- Prevention: Proper dietary management and monitoring for signs of discomfort.

Mites

- Diagnosis: Skin scrape and microscopic examination.
- Treatment: Antiparasitic medications (e.g., Eprinex) and topical treatments.
- Prevention: Regular skin care and environmental management to reduce mite populations.

Intestinal Parasites

- Diagnosis: Fecal exams and clinical signs of parasitism.
- Treatment: Appropriate anthelmintics based on fecal exam results.
- Prevention: Pasture management, regular fecal checks and strategic deworming protocols.

Conclusion

Effective management of common diseases and disorders in camelids requires a comprehensive understanding of their unique physiology and health needs. By adopting a proactive approach to diagnosis, treatment and prevention, veterinarians can ensure the well-being of these distinctive animals.

