Giving Your Horse Oral Medications

1. Giving medication to a horse is always a challenge. Ideally, you can give the medication as a flavored powder that can be mixed in the feed so the horse will eat the medication without knowing it. If you give medication this way, make sure you check the bottom of the feed bucket about 30 minutes after the horse has finished eating to ensure that all medication has been swallowed.

2. Many drugs, however, must be given directly in the horse's mouth. Before you bring the horse up to be treated, make sure that you have adequately prepared all the doses of medication. This means crushing any tablets into a powder and mixing with molasses or some other favorite flavor in a syringe, or drawing up liquids into a dosing syringe, or dialing the appropriate dose on a paste syringe and having it ready to squirt into the horse's mouth. Ask your veterinarian or pharmacist before mixing any medications with food or flavors to make sure that they won't inhibit the drug's effect.

3. Securely cross tie the horse or have a strong person hold the horse with a halter and lead rope. It is always good to have someone there to help you in case you have difficulty.

4. If you are giving large tablets (boluses), you may need a balling gun to give the medication. A balling gun is a plunger device that holds the bolus at the end of the plunger until placed in the back of the horse's mouth where the bolus can then be popped into the horse's mouth. Be sure that the horse actually swallows the bolus and does not spit it out.

5. If you are giving medication in a syringe, place the tip of the syringe in the corner of your horse's mouth. Elevate the horse's head slightly by lifting the halter or lead line. Wiggle the syringe tip back and forth against the tongue to stimulate movement of the tongue. When the tongue starts moving, start squirting paste onto the tongue and gums. The contents of the syringe will stick to the tongue and gums and ensure that the horse will eventually swallow the medication.

6. Some drugs may be irritating to the mouth and gums, so your veterinarian may want you to rinse your horse's mouth out with water after giving these medications.

7. The most important part of drug therapy is getting all of the drug that your veterinarian has prescribed into your horse for the entire time that he has prescribed therapy. If you have difficulty getting all of the medication into your horse, call your veterinarian for advice or assistance.