THE RISK OF ADMINISTRATION OF INTRAMUSCULAR DRUGS SUCH AS BANAMINE® TO HORSES

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Flunixin meglumine (Banamine®) is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agent that is very effective for the relief of pain, inflammation and fever in horses.

Banamine® is available in both injectable and oral formulas. Veterinarians routinely use the injectable formula intravenously (IV). Horse owners may have oral and injectable Banamine® on hand to relieve pain. It is important for owners to be aware of the risks if they give intramuscular (IM) injections of Banamine® or other medications.

Banamine® as well as a number of other drugs (ivermectin, progesterone, antihistamines, phenylbutazone, dipyrone, vitamin B complex, synthetic prostaglandins) can cause muscle damage when injected. While this usually causes few problems, spores of the bacteria Clostridium can lie dormant in healthy muscle and begin to proliferate if muscle is damaged. Growth of this bacteria causes Clostridial myositis, a serious and sometimes fatal condition. Within 6-72 hours of the bacterial infection beginning, horses develop swelling and crunchy areas of gas under the skin at the site of the IM injection. As bacterial toxins are released into the bloodstream horses quickly become very ill with signs of depression, colic, purple gums, and reluctance to move. Diagnosis of clostridial myositis is made by identifying gas produced by Clostridia in the damaged muscle using ultrasound and by examining aspirates of the area for bacteria.

It is very important to recognize and treat Clostridial myositis early and aggressively to decrease fatalities. Antibiotics such as intravenous penicillin and oral metronidazole are used in addition to surgically opening and cleaning any affected areas. Between 31% and 73% of horses survive Clostridial myositis but it may take months for the skin and muscle to heal.

Although the risks of Clostridial myositis are relatively low, whenever possible it is best to administer Banamine® orally or have a veterinarian administer the drug IV. If any IM injection is given, the area should be monitored for signs of swelling and gas pockets under the skin and horse watched for fever or depression. Call your veterinarian or the UMN CVM immediately if you notice these signs.