

Villa de Alpacas Farm – Basic Health Care for Adult Alpaca Males and Pet/Fiber Animals

Based on Southern Maryland Conditions

Dectomax Wormer to Prevent Meningeal Worm:

All adult alpacas (along with crias over 4 month of age) must be wormed with injectible Dectomax no later than every 60 days. *This must be injectible.* Pour-on Dectomax does not prevent Meningeal Worm (which can be fatal to alpacas). Dectomax MUST be injected to prevent and kill Mengingal Worm, just pouring it on their skin will not give you the desired result here! Dectomax is dosed at 1cc per 50 pounds of body weight. Give the shots SQ; giving them IM causes the drug to be metabolized too quickly, thus you would need to give the shot more often. Use 20 x 1 (3cc) luer lock syringes to administer this injection SQ. I purchase my syringes in boxes of 100 from PBS Animal Supply or KV Vet Supply for cost effectiveness. Some folks use Ivomec for this purpose too, but it should be noted that Ivomec's efficacy will only last 21-30 days at the absolute max. Thus, you would need to give this much more often.

Rabies Vaccination:

Alpacas must have an ImRab3 Rabies vaccination once per year. Crias should be given RV at 4 months and 5 months of age, then once per year after this. I do not recommend giving pregnant females RV. Therefore, breeding females should get RV before breeding or post-partum before their breed-back. By law in the state of Maryland, your veterinarian must administer RV, even though you can purchase this drug in other states and give it yourself to your own livestock. We recommend a fantastic veterinarian – Dr. Rania Lisas of Tidewater Veterinary Hospital in Charlotte Hall, MD. Her phone number is 301-884-3231. (This is the only injection that the veterinarian must do; the owner can do everything else for regular alpaca care.) Also note that all of the drugs listed here are actually “off-label” for alpaca usage. This means that the FDA has not tested them on alpacas. My advice on their usage is based on many years of experience and learning things “the hard way.”

CD&T Vaccination:

All alpacas must have a CD&T injection once per year. Crias are given CDT at day three, one month, two months, 4 months, and 6 months of age, and then every year after this. Give pregnant females CDT 30 days before they are due for birthing, as this will help to increase the new born cria's IgG levels. This liquid is very thin in nature; thus you do not need to use a thick needle which is necessary for the thicker Dectomax liquid. I recommend a 23 x 1 or 22 x 1 (3cc) luer lock syringe to administer this vaccine. Always administer 2cc (SQ) regardless of body weight. (So a young cria needs the full 2cc's as well!) It is a good practice to use as small gauge needle as necessary to do the job. This is much less painful for the alpaca. Why use a large gauge needle which is definitely more painful, if you do not need it! CDT can be easily and cheaply purchased at your farm supply store. It must be kept refrigerated.

Mineral Supplementation:

Special minerals developed just for alpacas/camelids must be available at all times to all alpacas. It is a free choice mineral supplement (powder) which they will eat when they need it. It is called the Alpaca Blend E Mineral Mix – made by Dr. Norm Evans – and can easily be purchased or ordered through Southern States or your farm supply store. Just keep the mineral mix inside the barn in a dry place, and replenish as necessary. Don't put the whole container out at once, since it can get moist (with humidity) and lose its efficacy. You do not need a fancy mineral dispenser. Just use a green feeder (like the ones for feeding grain), but fill it only an inch or two deep with the minerals. Keep the remainder of the minerals in a sealed container until dispensing. Alpacas don't generally need too many minerals, and they will eat more a different times of the year than other times. These minerals are imperative to the good health of pregnant and lactating females who can die without proper access! I also recommend always keeping the mineral feeder in the same place, so the alpacas know exactly where to go when they need it.

Water:

Clean water must be available at all times. Multiple water buckets and/or water sources are preferred. Buckets must be raised off the ground so that the alpacas can reach them but not be able to put their feet inside the containers. Alpacas love to play in water, especially when it is hot. It is best that they not contaminate their drinking water with dirty feet. Coccidia infections can be easily transferred this way, especially to crias.

Shearing:

Alpacas living permanently in Maryland must be shorn once a year, preferably in April or early May. Alpacas can die from heat stress if they are not shorn. If you shear later than this, you can risk the alpacas getting a severe sunburn on "barer" skin in the summer. Bad sunburns can cause many problems and increase the risk of fly strike on "oozing" or peeling skin – not to mention the added stress and major discomfort on the alpaca. You can use sunscreen on the alpacas if necessary. Severe sunburn can even cause skin infections which require the use of systemic antibiotics. Turning on fans during the heat of the day in the alpaca's living space will also be necessary, especially when heat and humidity are at their worst in Maryland. Alpacas love cold and dry climates; thus Maryland summers can be difficult for them, but they can adjust with proper care (shearing, providing shade and abundant clean water, turning on fans, etc.) There are numerous, excellent professional shearers available. Yet you must contact these folks in December or January for Spring shearing services since they get very busy and often travel all over the country. They must plan their travel routes to help the most people. Thus trying to schedule a shearer later than this, may be impossible.

Grass/Hay:

The absolute best food for alpacas is healthy green grass (preferably orchard grass and endophyte free soft grasses). Good pastures can make a tremendous difference and make life much easier for the alpaca owner. We highly recommend orchard grass (or any endophyte free and SOFT grass/hay that is approximately 12% protein). Alpacas don't need alfalfa, unless they are underweight and need extra supplementation. More than 20% alfalfa in an alpaca's

diet can cause lots of problems and mineral imbalances. It is good to have hay available in the barn at all times. During a summer drought or in the winter when grass is not plentiful, alpacas MUST have access to hay at all times. Alpacas do not eat much – only about 1-2% of their body weight per day. Thus 15 alpacas will go through a regular 50 pound bale per day. Sometimes, Timothy hay is the only type of hay available; this is not the preferred type of hay but can be used if necessary since the long Timothy pods can make alpaca fleece get very tangles – so much so that the pod and lots of hair must be physically “cut out” of the fleece. Timothy is also rather “stemmy” and full of harder grass parts, which alpacas do not prefer since they love the softer grasses. You will find that you will have a lot of wastage when using Timothy hay, which I will often use as bedding if necessary once the alpacas have picked through it.

Alpaca Food Supplement – A Grain Mixture:

We recommend the alpaca food/supplement made by Dr. Evans. At the present time, Blue Seal makes this food. Depending on the body score of the alpaca, the alpaca may need around a cup of feed per day as a supplement. Some thin alpacas may need considerably more than this, and others may not need any grain whatsoever. Heavier, adult male alpacas may not need any grain during the summer when grass is plentiful. Yet during the winter months, mostly every alpaca will need at least one to two cups of supplement every day. The alpaca owner will need to adjust grain amounts throughout the year, based on body score, animal weights, cold weather, etc. Feeding too much grain without adequate soft hay and grass consumption is a recipe for ulcers and lots of health problems. Pregnant females who are nursing will also need more supplementation. You need to determine the amount of supplementation based on the needs of each individual alpaca at different times of the year. I will often separate groups of alpacas into separate fields/shelters based on their body score and grain requirements. For example, I will try to put all of my alpacas which need extra supplementation in one area. (I have a fat group and a thin group for both my males and females.) This makes feeding time much easier!

Body Scoring:

Body Score your alpacas on a regular basis. This is the best way to determine their overall health and whether adequate amounts of nutrition are being provided. Once a male alpaca has reached adulthood, regular weighing is not as important as body scoring. I am constantly putting my hands on all my alpacas, not just at “herd health” when administering Dectomax. Thus I am constantly aware of their body scores. Try to keep alpacas at a #5 body score. If they fall below this, increase their grain rations and provide better hay. If they are too fat – a body score greater than #7, then decrease their grain or limit grain entirely based on the time of year. Some hay or grass must always be available since alpacas are modified ruminants and require this for proper digestion and good health.

Vitamin Supplementation:

I give all of my newborn crias a Vit. A/D shot on their first day of birth (1/2cc). All vitamin injections are given IM. I will also give them an additional B-Complex shot based on other factors not listed here. After this, all of my crias will get 1cc of Vit. A/D at one month and two months, especially if they are fall crias or born during periods of reduced sunlight. Dark

animals also appear to need more Vit. A/D than light colored animals. Depending on other factors, I may give Vit. A/D (1.5cc) every month or two after this, up until they are ready to breed. Vitamin A is teratogenic, so it can cause birth defects if given to a pregnant female. Thus, I will stop giving Vit. A/D injections to a female about a month before she is ready to breed. Some folks have had bad reactions to Vit. A/D when given by injection. Personally, I have never had this problem, but I highly recommend purchasing your vitamins (given by injection) from a reputable veterinary supply company, and not necessarily from your local farm store. Giving more than one type of injection per day may also increase an animal's potential for severe reactions to the drug. Thus I do not recommend giving more than two different types of injections at one time.

Poop Removal:

Clean up the poop piles every day. Take the poop away from the alpaca field. Do not pile your poop inside the same field as the alpacas. This will minimize the potential for parasite problems and keep flies away in the summer. Alpaca poop is an excellent fertilizer and can often be used directly without composting.

Normal Basic Information:

Normal Temperature: 98 to 104 degrees
(temps can vary based on whether the alpaca is sunbathing, but you definitely need to treat the situation with temps above 104 degrees!)

Adult Pulse Rate: 50 to 90 per minute
(handling a stressed alpaca will certainly increase the pulse)

Cria Pulse Rate at Rest: 75 to 100 per minute

Respiratory Rate at Rest: 20 to 30 per minute (cria and adult rates)

Reasons to Call the Veterinarian:

- A) Any alpaca that can not rise.
- B) An alpaca with the inability to coordinate movement.
- C) An alpaca with seizures (but it is not uncommon for some alpacas to react with a seizure type of behavior when going into strong sunlight after being in a dark barn.)
- D) An alpaca which has excessive drooling or vomiting saliva for more than an hour (Choke from grain is not uncommon). Some alpacas eat their grain supplement too quickly. Under these conditions, put large rocks in the feed bowl to help prevent them from gobbling too much food in one swallow.
- E) Any alpaca that does not eat for a day or has bad breath for more than 2 days.
- F) Any adult alpaca which has diarrhea present for over 24 hours.

- G) Any pregnant female experiencing labor for more than one hour.
- H) Any pregnant female showing sign of discomfort for more than 3 hours.
- I) Any animal with a temperature over 104 degrees (some alpacas love to sunbathe; their temperature can get high during these conditions). If heat stress is an issue, you may need to hose down the alpaca with water, do some fast shearing of fleece, and give Banamine & B-Complex shots.
- J) An alpaca mother which has given birth but has no milk or colostrum. (I have had excellent results with giving Domperidone (orally 2.5cc twice a day) for at least 5-7 days. This must be given to the dam immediately after birth to stimulate milk production. Dr. Pollard's Herbs (Stimulation/Lactation Herbal Blend) also can work well to stimulate the dam's milk production. Some folks have also had good results adding more cracked corn and brewer's yeast to the dam's diet. For the cria, I always have frozen llama plasma on hand from Triple J Farms in Bellingham, Washington. I may even give a valuable female cria an extra boost by giving this plasma within the first 8 hours after birth. I prefer to tube the cria under these conditions, as I don't want any of this very expensive plasma to go to waste. This is a somewhat controversial treatment, but I swear by its excellent results in increasing a cria's IgG.
- K) Any cria diarrhea which is present more than 24 hours.
- L) Any female that is not pregnant after 5 or 6 breedings (and this is after you have changed the male. Sometimes, just switching to another proven herdsire can make all of the difference!)
- M) A newborn cria that can not stand within 3 hours after birth. (This cria may be "crashing" and needs supplementation immediately.)

Additional Questions/Concerns:

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call Angel at Villa de Alpacas Farm: 301-888-CRIA. I really want to help you, and I especially want you to be happy living with alpacas! The best advice I can give you is to know your animals and know the difference between normal and abnormal behavior. And, of course, listen to the excellent advice of your own veterinarian. Different climates and areas will often present other issues to deal with, which are not listed here. The advice which I am providing is based on alpaca life in southern Maryland and from my many years of experience. I am not a trained veterinarian, but I have often found that my own experience and knowing the behavior of my own alpacas is crucial to my successful husbandry techniques which saves me money and keeps my alpacas healthier and happier in the long run. My absolute favorite source of alpaca veterinary information is Dr. Norm Evan's Book: The Alpaca Field Manual. This is a MUST for any alpaca breeder/owner. Also, one of my favorite remedies to have "on-hand" is Banamine, which I dose at 1cc per 100

pounds. I prefer to give this SQ – twice per day for no more than 3 days. In my opinion, Banamine can be a wonder drug for a sick alpaca, but you must talk to your own veterinarian about this before administration. I have noticed, though, that when given more than 5 days in a row, Banamine can cause digestive problems in alpacas. Dr. Evans states in his book that he has not found Banamine to generate ulcers, as it can in other ruminants. Personally, I have experienced some digestive changes in alpacas when this drug is given more than 5 days in a row. Yet, Banamine has helped me in so many ways, and I will often use it whenever I see a potential problem. Again, I am not trying to take the place of your own veterinarian's advice in any way. I just feel that giving Banamine has helped me a lot in many different circumstances, most especially in comforting a sick or uncomfortable alpaca.