

January to June Critical to Whitetail Health

By Dr. Joe Ables

The breeding season has ended. One of the biggest events of the year, that consumes the majority of our time throughout the year, has finally come to an end. We all take a big sigh of relief and desire a long winter's nap. The "all-nighters"; pulling CIDRs, sorting deer, vaccinations, breeding doe, and getting cover bucks put into the correct pens has just been completed. Now what? Is it now time to relax and wait until fawning season? I hope you answered no! This is actually one of the most critical times of the year. Not to bust your bubble, but now we have to concentrate on managing doe health, dealing with post rut bucks, antler development, and planning to ensure the best fawn crop. We will provide some simple easy ideas for January to June to ensure the highest quality of health and production from our deer herds.

The goal of every producer should involve producing healthy deer, decreasing treatments, decrease labor, and minimizing late night phone calls to your Veterinarian. Before you can have healthy fawns, you must start with a healthy doe. Therefore, careful planning ahead at this time is crucial. What is going on at this time with the doe herd? Doe have just finished the breeding season, moved from pen to pen, and likely have pen handled/vaccinated, which maybe the only time they have been touched in 365 days. Stress is a very important factor to deal with because it weakens the immune system. This is also the period of time that the fetus is rapidly growing. Providing deer with optimum nutrition is important, however ensuring they get maximum absorption is critical. Deer that can digest may not be able to absorb the key nutrients. Start researching supplements and probiotics quickly and get them started ASAP.

Vaccinating doe in late March and early April is ideal. The doe should have been vaccinated prior to the breeding season, normally in October at "CIDR in." This "Booster" vaccine will increase circulating antibodies in the blood stream. Antibodies are the natural proteins, produced by an animal in response to a bacterial, viral, fungal insult and hopefully from vaccines. These antibodies serve as "reserve soldiers" that actually fight the foreign invaders. Typically, I would like to vaccinate doe in April, but in our area, it may be too hot to run them through the facility. Strategically, vaccinating your doe against diseases that are prevalent in your area is extremely beneficial. Vaccines increase the antibody levels circulating through the doe's circulatory system and these antibodies end up in the "first milk," or colostrum. Colostrum is naturally produced by the doe starting approximately 60 days prior to fawning. Therefore, "boosting" this antibody rich milk is an excellent way to ensure healthy fawns and

doe. This is one of nature's priceless products, and you can enhance it naturally via a proper vaccination program.

Vaccination programs are critical in an effort to increase the quality of the doe's colostrum. Respiratory vaccines are at the top of my list. 75 % of sick fawn cases over 2 months of age that I see have a respiratory component to them. I recommend Prespense H/M. I have seen great response with it over the past 10 years. *Pasturella haemolytica* and *multocida* are the most prevalent bacterial involved in pneumonia. Diarrhea is the second most common infection and we will discuss it when we get to the first 24 hours of fawn care. Another vaccine that I have been using more and more over the past few years is Fusoguard. This is a vaccine for *Fusobacterium necrophorum* and is helpful in preventing "foot rot" and "mouth rot" cases in deer. This anaerobic bacterium is commonly responsible for the small golf ball sized abscesses on deer heads and jaws and the organism is found in the gastrointestinal tract and feces of deer. Therefore, if you have been raising deer for an extended period of time, you know about fecal buildup leading to contamination problems. An idea to consider is to rest pens for 30-60 days and broadcast granulated lime in these pens before turning pregnant does to fawn out. Imagine if a woman delivered her child in a septic tank. These cases can be easily prevented and controlled with proper sanitation and vaccinating with Fusoguard. Vaccinating against your region's most prevalent diseases is an inexpensive tool and produces an enormous rate of return on your investment.

Deworming at this time is critical. Fecal exams are important and simple to obtain prior to vaccinating. Proper diagnosis and correct treatment of parasites is crucial. Parasites can drain the body of precious proteins needed for growth and can definitely decrease the immune system. There are also some dewormers that do not kill particular types of parasites. For example, I have seen more Giardia diarrhea cases this year than ever before. Giardia protozoan are not responsive to Corid, Dectomax, Ivomec, Cydectin, or even Valbazen. Fenbendazole has been the treatment of choice at double the cattle dose fed for minimum of 7 days. Many parasites have become resistant to many of our every day dewormers. Therefore, build a healthy relationship with your local Veterinarian. Your Veterinarian is an excellent resource and they had to spend a lot of time learning parasite life cycles and treatment protocols in Veterinary school.

The best way to produce "Super fawns" is for the producer to produce "Super Colostrum" from a structured vaccination program. I am not a big proponent of vaccinating fawns at a few days to a few weeks of age. A fawn vaccinated at a day of age is unable to utilize the vaccine until at least 3 weeks after injection due to length of time it takes the immune system to produce antibodies (immunoglobulins). The doe's colostrum, maternal antibodies, typically last up to 8 weeks. A few cases involving fawns with wrecked immune systems have actually occurred

from vaccinating too early because it has interfered with the doe's maternal antibody response. After you are comfortable with your protocol for producing "Super Colostrum," it is time to use a proper preparation of a fawn paste (within the first 24 hours) that includes all important immunoglobulins to assure fawns get the maximum immune system to ensure your fawning protocol is successful.

Fawning time should be simple since you have prepared months in advance dealing with momma. On the first day, the fawn's digestive tract is very "Porous." In other words, they can absorb large proteins thru the intestinal wall that adults cannot. Large proteins include Immunoglobulins and particular vaccines. Yes, we stated earlier that vaccinating fawns is not favored by me. A vaccine that I would recommend consists of pathogens most experienced by fawns with in the first 2 months of life. The advantageous absorptive period only lasts the first 24 hours of life. *Escherichia coli (E. coli)*, *Salmonella spp.*, *Clostridial spp.*, *Rotavirus*, and *coronavirus* are responsible for many early diarrhea cases in fawns. I have observed a major decrease in fawn diarrhea when implementing this vaccine technique with a corresponding fawn paste. When the fawn paste is given orally, it is quickly absorbed and rapidly enters the blood stream. A vaccine on the other hand takes approximately three weeks to produce functioning antibodies. This advantageous absorptive period is ideal for the immediate boost of the immune system from Immunoglobulins (antibodies) found in the colostrum and paste, but the duration of activity of these two may last only 2 months. The advantage of adding a gastrointestinal vaccine and fawn paste, at a day of age, allows for an extended period of activity. As the natural immunity wears off (6-8 weeks), the vaccine's antibodies are beginning to be functional and can last another 30-60 days. Dog, cat, pig, and human immune systems differ in that colostrum is not as important for providing for an immediate immune system. The difference comes from the different type of placental attachment to the uterus among the species. The latter mentioned animals have a placental attachment that allows the fetus to be bathed in their mother's blood in utero allowing them to have a developed immune system when born, unlike deer and other ruminants. Other key things to keep in mind are to use strong tinctured iodine on the umbilical cords and in the holes in the ears produced by tagging. The iodine turns the soft moist tissue into "leather" and prevents bacteria from entering the body.

During this period, White-tailed bucks are at their worst metabolic activity of the year. They have thought about chasing ladies for the last few months and have not considered eating. Sound familiar? Body fat reserves and metabolism are lacking at this time. Parasites further deplete them. It is crucial in getting this metabolic train back on track quickly as to provide a healthy immune system, thus leading to efficient production. What is this "production" that is being discussed? In our industry, antler development and production is our number one advertisement. A weak and deprived animal is not concerned with antler development first. The body kicks in a survival mode and attempts to stay alive. Imagine for a minute that you had

the Flu and have not been eating for a few days. Now, you are called to run the Boston Marathon that day. What do you think would happen? Our body would not be concerned with running and competing. It would be concerned about resting in bed and getting well. Therefore, if we are building our program on a rock solid foundation, the cornerstone, we must start at the foundation of the animal. This foundation is metabolism and it begins at the cellular level. The cell is responsible for producing energy for the entire body. Therefore if we can assure the body has abundant levels of key vitamins and minerals, which are responsible for fueling the cells, we allow the body to start from its foundation at 100% production which will perpetuate throughout the body. Consider a diesel engine that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 52 weeks a year. Now imagine a fuel source that allows this engine to run continuously without stopping and the fuel is everlasting and overabundant. Nutrition and absorption of these key fuel sources is critical. Bucks should have abundant high quality protein hay sources, highly digestible protein, vitamins and minerals, and probiotics. Probiotics boost the normal bacterial, fungal, and protozoan quantity in the rumen and gastrointestinal tract. These microorganisms increase digestive efficiency and further support cellular metabolism. A fully functioning rumen is critical in post rut bucks to promote efficient conversion of feedstuffs to absorbable energy. As quickly as the metabolic pathway can be turned on to maximal level for these post rut bucks, the quicker they become healthy and can focus on antler production. Therefore, we can naturally allow the bucks to reach 100% of their genetic potential for antler production. I would recommend vaccinations against pneumonia and other diseases prevalent to your area after the bucks have been “turned back on.” Vaccinating too early can cause problems with the immune system as well as your pocket book. Prior to the bucks returning to pre rut condition, if you were to vaccinate them, their immune systems would respond pretty much the same as if you squirted the vaccine on the ground. Continuing these ideas throughout the antler growing season, a producer enables their bucks to grow healthier immune systems, produce an efficient metabolism, and allow their bucks to become the monsters they had dreamed out in their breeding plan.

From January to June, it is critical to turn our thinking caps on to prevent what could possibly be disastrous to our herds. A careful thought out plan helps concrete a preventative style of management versus a treatment style. Start your plan with your local Veterinarian. A comprehensive plan involving, doe, fawns, and bucks is critical. As a Veterinarian, my first goal is preventing disease rather than treating disease. As any producer knows, the latter style is more costly and results are not as positive. Good luck and God bless!

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