



Equine Newsletter January 2016



Coombefield Equine Clinic
Summerleaze Farm, Axminster

Worming in Winter

What worms do we worry about during the winter months and what should we be treating for?

Most parasitic worms have a reasonably straight forward lifespan. The horse picks up worm larvae from the pasture as it eats. This makes its way to the gut where it matures into an adult worm and starts to produce eggs. The eggs are then passed in the droppings, hatches into a larval worm and then contaminate the pasture – repeating the cycle. In many worm species the time taken from egg ingestion to development of an adult worm that is able to produce eggs is around 7 weeks. So the traditional method of worming every 6 weeks aims to kill off these worms before they produce eggs – therefore reducing pasture contamination.

The eggs are pretty hardy and can last through frosts etc. but won't hatch into larvae in cold temperatures – so worming once during the winter will kill the adults in the horse, it won't take in any more larvae and you don't need to worry until the weather warms up again....right?

The small red worms or small strongyle species have a cunning way of surviving the winter. While some eggs will survive on the pasture, as the outside temperature cools some larval worms will create little cysts for themselves in the gut walls and wait until spring before coming out and developing into adults.



This causes us two problems –

- 1)** Traditional wormers do not cross tissue barriers and will not get these larvae safe in their cystic bomb shelters.
- 2)** There appears to be a poorly understood signal from the adult worm population which retards the further development of these larvae. So if a horse is badly infested and the adult worms are suddenly killed off with a wormer the larvae will emerge ALL AT ONCE. This causes massive damage to the gut wall and can result in fatal diarrhoea.

One way around this is to treat the horse with a wormer in the winter that kills these encysted larvae – either a 5 day course of fenbendazole or a one off dose of moxidectin.

Please bear in mind that while most wormers are extremely safe, Moxidectin has a narrow safety margin. It is safe to use at the correct dose so please use weigh tapes etc. especially on young horses, miniatures and donkeys...all who may weigh less than you think.



Bots are another species we worm for in the winter. As the cold weather comes in the adult bot flies die off and this species overwinters in horses stomach. While in most cases these are relatively harmless stowaways the flies/eggs can be very irritating and worming during the winter with ivermectin/moxidectin can effectively reduce the population.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms are a common parasite in the horse and have been associated as a significant risk factor in causing colic (including large colon displacements and torsions). Sadly they are unreliable egg shedders and so faecal worm counts will not always pick them up. Blood tests and more recently Saliva testing are accurate ways of determining risk in a horse with an unknown worming history but these tests look for antibodies to the tapeworms which can stay high for a long time even after the tapeworms have been killed.

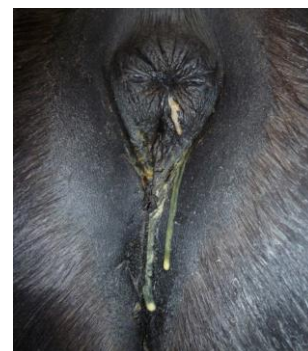


The tapeworm lifecycle involves development inside a forage mite (commonly found on pasture) which becomes dormant in the colder weather (most years!).

So winter is a good time to remove the population within the horse population. Tapeworms are not affected by the same wormers used for the Strongyle or Bot larvae. As such we need to use either a praziquantel or double dose pyrantel wormer. Thankfully many wormers now offer a combination of active ingredients to tackle both types of worms.

Pin worms

Pin worms live at the very end of the gastro-intestinal tract and lay their eggs on the skin around the anal opening. These can cause irritation and bottom/tail rubbing which can be quite severe. Sometimes a yellow/orange discharge or small plaque like accumulations may be seen around this area in affected horses.



They are sometimes seen in horses droppings after worming and again because of their odd egg laying behaviour sometimes will not appear on faecal worm egg counts.

Because of their position in the tract they often receive very dilute doses of wormers and as such have developed a high level of resistance. Diagnosis is made by taking a sticky tape strip from this area and examining it for pin worm eggs. If present treatment includes washing the area around the anus and applying petroleum jelly to stop eggs sticking or treatment with fenbendazole (panacur guard). These worms can be VERY tricky to get rid of and often we need to resort to drugs that are not licenced for horses; Please give us a call for further advice.



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EQUINE INFO

If you would like to speak to an Equine vet or arrange a visit

Please ring 01297 630515

Medicines can be requested via email or by telephone

Email: equine@axvets.co.uk