

worm control programmes



Worms live in the intestines of horses and ponies.

Large numbers of intestinal worms can cause many problems including colic, weight loss, diarrhoea, poor performance and even death. Controlling the level of worms is therefore very important to maintaining a healthy horse. A close relationship with your vet and an understanding of the key points of worm control will allow the worm burden of your horse to be kept at a healthy level.

■ **The Common Intestinal Worms**



Redworms. Small redworms are the most common worm of all. Horses become infected by eating the worm larvae when grazing infected pasture. These larvae develop into the adult worm in the horse's guts. The adult worms then shed eggs which pass out in the horse's droppings onto the pasture and so the cycle continues. During the autumn months the larvae burrow into the gut wall and hibernate there until spring. This state is known as encysted. In the spring the mass emergence of the larvae can result in intestinal inflammation and severe diarrhoea.

Large redworms are not as common as the small redworms due to the effectiveness of modern wormers but when present they can obstruct the blood supply to the intestines and can cause severe colic.

Tapeworms. Horses become infected with tapeworms by eating mites that live on the pasture. Tapeworms live

at the junction between the small intestines and the caecum and are a common cause of spasmodic colic.

Ascarids & Strongyloides

These worms affect young horses and foals. Ascarids live in the small intestine and can cause ill thrift and diarrhoea. Strongyloides also live in the small intestine and are spread to the foal through infected mares milk.

■ **Worm Control**

There are two main aspects to worm control and they are of equal importance:

- 1) **Pasture Management**
- 2) **Worming Medication**

Pasture Management

The main aim is to minimise the pasture contamination with worm eggs and therefore greatly reduce the number of worms your horse comes in contact with.



Some of the key aspects of pasture management are:

- Poo pick the pasture regularly. (*this is the most effective step at reducing the level of worm eggs on the pasture*)
- Don't over stock the fields. Ideally no more than one

or two horses per acre.

- Co-graze with sheep and cows. They will remove a lot of worms from the pasture.

A warning: Harrowing is not a good idea. It spreads the muck across the pasture. In hot climates it works well as the worm eggs dry out and die. Unfortunately in the UK the climate is too damp in winter or summer and harrowing causes the whole pasture to be contaminated.

Worming Medication

The main aim of worm medication is to reduce the amount of worms that are produced in the horses' droppings and so reducing the amount of worms on the pasture. The two main types of worming methods are the routine and targeted programs.

1) Routine Worming

This involves worming your horses at the manufacturers' recommended dosing interval and rotating the class of drug used each year. With this method horses are often wormed more regularly than is necessary which increases the likelihood of resistance developing. This method however is useful if your horse is sharing grazing with young stock, horses with unknown or high worm burdens and if you cannot collect dropping samples from individual horses.

2) Targeted Worming

This method involves only worming the horses when necessary. It relies on regular sampling of the droppings to assess the number of worm eggs in each horse. High numbers of worm eggs indicate that the horse requires worming.



Other benefits of targeted worming programs are that less wormer is generally used which is cheaper, better for your horse's guts, better for the environment (the wormers can kill insects on the pasture) and also reduces the risk of worms becoming resistant.

Two of the main limitations of targeted worming are that tapeworms and the hibernating small redworms cannot be detected in the poo samples. Blood samples can be taken to detect tapeworms but in general it is suggested that both are treated for at least once a year.

Both methods have their place, deciding which one is right for your horse is part of the role of your vet. Whichever method you and your vet decide to use it is essential to discourage worm resistance. This can be achieved by using weigh tapes or scales to calculate your horse's weight rather than guessing and not overusing the wormers, always follow the manufacturer's guidelines for dosing intervals and alter the type of wormer each year.

Foals can be wormed from 4 – 6wks old. Targeted worming can be used with blood samples if required as most foals don't need worming until 3 months old and some worms in the guts are good for the development of the immune system.

■ Healthy Horse, Healthy Pockets

With the credit crunch in full swing there are many opportunities to tighten purse strings but at what cost to wellbeing? There are savings that can be made that benefit both your horse and your pockets.



Worming your horse is an essential part of maintaining its health. Many owners use regular worming throughout the year to control the levels of worms in their horse's gut. This is easy to do but did you know that over worming is not only harmful to your horse's gut but it is also costing you a lot of money?

Checking the number of worms in your horses muck during the grazing season will allow you to know whether a wormer is necessary. The cost of a worm check is about £10 (*far cheaper than a wormer*) and groups of 10 or more will receive a 10% discount.

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