

Fact Sheet

Targeted Worming

Introduction

Routine worming or anthelmintic treatment has traditionally been given at frequent intervals throughout the year to prevent disease or problems associated with a worm burden. Due to decreasing levels of worm related disease and increasing wormer resistance, there has been a change in the way vets now recommend worming horses. We now strongly recommend not utilising the traditional approach of regular worming at intervals throughout the year and instead adopting a targeted approach.



Signs of severe worm infestation

- Weight loss
- Lack of weight gain
- Diarrhoea
- Colic
- Death (although this is very rare)

Most disease attributed to worm burdens are seen in young horses (under five years), after which most horses build up an immunity to worms and high levels of burden causing diseases is unusual. In fact a low level of worm burden is considered normal in horses.



Targeted worming

Targeted worming means you only worm your horse as and when it is necessary. This means they are not exposed to unnecessary doses of a wormer which will increase resistance to these drugs and limit future success, and it will also save you unnecessary expense.

One good rationale for targeted worming is what is known as the 80:20 rule - 20% of the horses in a herd will carry 80% of the worms. As such, only around 20% of horses will need regular worming.

To establish risk and worm burden through spring, summer and autumn, we can perform faecal worm egg counts. Depending on the number of eggs we find, this will dictate whether your horse will need worming or not.

If your horse doesn't need worming, our best will advise what worming product you should use.

Remember, a low level of eggs is completely normal and does not always need treating and should be encouraged to reduce the incidence of resistance.



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Wormer resistance

- Resistance is seen when a high proportion of the parasites within a horse are no longer killed by the drug, rendering it ineffective
- Worming too frequently will put pressure on the worm population for genetic selection, so those not killed by the wormer will survive, producing more offspring that are not susceptible
- If the same class of wormer is used repeatedly then the same selection pressure is applied to the population
- Incorrectly estimating weight and under dosing may allow more potentially resistant worms to survive
- Once resistance is seen it cannot be reversed. As these drugs become ineffective this will lead to a rise in worm related disease. We do not currently have any new wormers available for use, so we must protect and preserve the ones we do have
- The health, welfare and performance of horses infected with resistant worms may be compromised
- Please contact our vets if you are concerned resistance is on your premises and they can discuss performing a faecal egg count reduction test to check



Management tips

- Remove faeces from pasture at least twice weekly and preferably every couple of days. This will reduce the worm burden more effectively than any other treatment
- Avoid spreading horse manure on pasture grazed by horses, e.g. harrowing
- Avoid overstocking and overgrazing
- Rotate grazing with sheep or cattle or rest pastures regularly (this is best done in hot weather)
- Avoid moving horses to clean pasture within two weeks of worming. It used to be recommended that we “dosed and moved”, but this is misguided as it results in all of the resistant parasites moving with the horses and all of the non-resistant ones being left behind
- Muck out stables regularly especially when they contain foals and weanlings
- Muck heaps should be separated from grazing areas – worms can migrate many metres across pasture
- Prevent development of rough areas where horses regularly defecate as this can serve as a reservoir for worms
- New horses should be dewormed with praziquantel and moxidectin and quarantined for a minimum of three days after de-worming. During this time faeces should be collected and not spread onto paddocks



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