

## Maintaining Optimum Health for Optimum Digestive Efficiency

### What is so important about de-worming horses?

The vitality and well-being of horses of all ages are threatened by a variety of internal parasites, and the use of control measures ensures vigour and best performance. It is fairly safe to say that most horses have some population of internal parasites at almost any time. Especially in areas where horses have been pastured for many years, some vets feel that it is virtually impossible to prevent exposure as horses graze. At best, routine de-worming keeps that number of worms at a level that is minimally harmful and de-worming, whether it be targeted strategic dosing or interval dosing, should be included in any programme of equine management.

### My horses look healthy. Will a few worms hurt them?

Parasites can easily keep horses from growing and performing to their best potential and in some cases they can create conditions that are capable of killing a horse. A heavy parasite load prevents the proper uptake of nutrients from the digestive tract and horses may show diarrhea, anemia, weight loss, coughing, pot belly and poor coat condition. Worms can also cause ulceration or rupture of the ceacum and colic can result from blockage or tissue damage in the digestive tract.

### How can I find out for sure whether my horses have worms?

An examination of the manure can give limited information about which types of worms are present in the digestive tract. Because parasites in some life stages do not produce eggs, the presence of eggs in the faeces shows only that the horse has an infestation of mature worms. If a horse is allowed to graze or eat hay off the ground, he is almost certain to have some level of parasite infestation. Generally speaking, if your horse predominantly lives in or is turned out but only has himself or a mate for company and you regularly poo pick your field, this would be considered a low risk situation (although if you are struggling to maintain body condition or your horse has a pot belly or poor coat this could indicate a high worm burden) and targeted strategic worm dosing would be recommended. Faecal egg counts are recommended to be performed every 8-10 weeks. If the count is more than 200 epg then anthelmintic treatment is required.

A vet or worming specialist can provide information about how to collect and test manure and then suggest worming programmes.



## Fact Sheet



### What else can be done to limit exposure of horses to parasites?

Pasture management is an important part of parasite control. Rotating pastures and the movement of horses to clean and uncontaminated pastures is helpful but may be limited by stable and fencing constrictions. Young foals and yearlings should be given preferential consideration for grazing locations.

Chain harrowing and topping to break up manure piles are good agronomic practices and also make microclimatic conditions in the pasture less favorable for the development and survival of strongyle eggs and larvae.

Poo picking will decrease exposure of grazing horses to parasite eggs and is still an invaluable technique!!

Population density should be held within reasonable limits, because strongyle infection risks increase geometrically; i.e. doubling the horse per couple of acres quadruples the exposure.

### Final Word

No feeding regime can be completely successful if horses are not able to take advantage of the nutrition provided by the forage and concentrate feeds that we provide them. Proper and timely de-worming is an integral part of any careful management scheme and will allow horses of all ages to benefit maximally from the balanced diets that are made available to them.

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