



September 2023 Worming

Why are worms in horses an issue?

Horses, ponies and donkeys have co-existed with worms for centuries however they would have grazed hundreds of miles so they would be less likely to pick up a high worm burden. How we keep horses using the same fields every year and keeping horses in large groups makes them more susceptible to building up higher worm burdens. High worm burdens in horses can result in weight loss, colic, diarrhoea, permanent damage to the gut wall resulting in long term difficulty with maintaining condition and even death so it is important to take the issue seriously.

What are worm egg counts?

A worm egg count is a microscopic examination of faeces from a horse to detect and count the number of roundworm eggs present. All you need to do is bring a small fresh faeces sample into the practice for it to be performed. The worm egg count not only quantifies the level of your horse's worm burden, but it also shows what species of worms are present, guiding whether your horse needs to be wormed and what product to use. It is recommended that you do worm egg counts every 8 weeks. If your horse only has a very small level of worm eggs picked up on the WEC (depending on the situation) it is often advised not to worm to maintain a low level of worms that are susceptible to wormers.

Unfortunately, tape worm doesn't show up on WECs so it is still recommended to worm for tape worm each year or you can do a blood or saliva test for tape worm to find out if your horse needs to be wormed. Your worming protocol should also include a moxidectin or ivermectin wormer in the winter to remove the risk of any encysted worms and bot fly damage.

Why shouldn't we just keep worming every few months like we use to?

Worming traditionally in horses involved regularly using a wormer every few months to reduce the risk of a high worm burden however we are now completely moving away from this method of worming. The reasons behind this move is mainly due to the increase in prevalence of resistance to the wormers and that not all horses are impacted by worms in quite the same way. Worm infestation can vary a huge amount between different horses. Younger horses, particularly foals and yearlings have lower immunity to parasites and are likely to release more eggs increasing the overall burden. Immunity to parasites increases up to the age of 5-6 years and then wanes in horses in their late teens. It is estimated that 80% of the worm infestation is present in only 20% of the horses. Targeted worming programmes using faecal worm egg counts (WECs) play an important role in managing equine parasites, reducing unnecessary treatments so that each individual horse is only treated as needed.



What else can I do to lower the risk of my horse getting a high worm burden?

Ideally as part of your worming protocol you should also poo pick your fields at least twice per week. Grazing with ruminants (cows, sheep etc) can also help to reduce the numbers of equine worms on the pasture.

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What should I do if I get a new horse?

All new arrivals should receive moxidectin and praziquantel wormer and be stabled for 3 days to allow excretion of parasite eggs. All droppings should be collected and disposed and not spread on paddocks. A WEC in 10-14 days after treatment will confirm if the horse has a low enough worm burden to be turned out with the rest of the herd.

Why do worms become resistant to wormers?

Wormer resistance occurs when a proportion of the worms picked up from a pasture are no longer affected by the chosen worming treatment. Several factors contribute to the development of resistance, including underdosing and the frequent, perhaps unnecessary, administration of wormers over time. Hence it is so important to ensure you are using worm egg counts to only use wormers when required. It is also essential when worming to try and use an accurate weight for your horse, the vast majority of owners tend to underestimate their horse's weight so it is worth if you can using a local weigh bridge or a weigh tape to get a weight before worming.



Don't forget we have a worming package that includes four worm egg counts a year, a saliva test for tape worm, text reminders and one wormer a year (if it is needed!)

Is there any risk to worming my horse?

A very small percentage of horses can react to wormers particularly if they have a high worm burden so it is advisable to worm in the morning. Then if there are any side effects there is more likely to be someone around to ensure we respond to them. If you have a new horse with unknown worming history it is also advisable to speak to your vet if you are worried there may be a high burden as we may wish to use a particular product or add in the use of steroids to reduce the risk of associated inflammation with a large number of worms dying at once. It is far more dangerous to leave a horse without effective worm control but if your horse has ever reacted to a wormer please let us know so we can potentially advise the use of a different product.

Want to see what we are talking about?

Check out the Summerleaze Vets Youtube channel to see a video of how we perform our worm egg counts.

Upcoming Event

Equine First Aid Evening- Lectures and practicals

27th September, 7pm for 7.30pm at Drakes Farm TA199EY.

Please bring your own chair. Please RSVP at summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk