

WORMING

For decades, the main goal of worming our horses was to prevent parasitic disease and maintain our horses' health. With the current status of wormer resistance, it is clear that it is just as important to maintain the effectiveness of our current drugs for as long as possible. The changes in worming practices reflect the new need to find a balance in terms of the usage of chemical wormers.

A challenge exists for horse owners, due to the many different housing environments that horses are kept in. A common approach to worming all horses in all situations is no longer appropriate. Worming needs to be more of a 'holistic' program rather than simply relying on chemical wormers (anthelmintics).

Some Facts:

- The most important worm to consider in creating your worming program is the small cyathostomes. This however is NOT the only worm that needs to be treated and/or considered.
- Resistance to anthelmintics is real – and an effort by all horse owners is required to minimize the risk of increased resistance. If we have developed resistance worms to all of our defences, we will all end up with very sick horses.
- It is important that some worm larvae exist without being exposed to wormers. These larvae will develop into worms that have less resistance to the wormers we use. These then act to 'dilute' the population of larvae that have been exposed and therefore may have some developing resistance. By making sure there is a reasonable population of 'unexposed' worms, the development of resistance will be slower.
- New practices involve minimizing use of wormers, not eliminating them completely. They ARE required as part of a good management program.
- All horses will have a worm burden, the aim is not to completely eliminate, but to keep the worm burden to a manageable number for the horse.
- Breaking the lifecycle of the worm is important as an overall strategy. This can occur while the worm is in its host (the horse), or on the pasture. Clean/safe pasture is important.
- Young horses are major contributors to pasture contamination, and should be wormed routinely.
- Climate has a large effect on how quickly and whether or not the larvae deposited on the pasture develop. Larvae need water, and they develop quicker in warm temperatures. Drought will minimize pasture contamination.

How do I reduce the risk of Resistance?

- Give the correct dose of wormer. Underdosing will allow survival and reproduction of more worms, which over time will increase resistance
- Try to maintain adequate control with the least number of treatments per year
- Use pasture rotation, and create 'safe' paddocks. Worm and then move your horse.
- Do not rely solely on the use of wormers
- Worm horses when their Faecal Egg Count (FEC), is significant.

- Use a wormer that works. Check the effectiveness of your wormer by a Faecal Egg Reduction Test (FECRT), this is a great way to determine whether or not you have any resistance problems.
- Try not to worm, when pasture contamination is likely to be low

How do I reduce the worm population on my property, or the population my horse is exposed to?

- Collect manure where possible, before larvae get time to develop
- Reduce grazing pressure. Larvae normally move approximately 50cm away from a manure pile. Without grazing pressure, a horse is much less likely to graze that close to manure.
- Introduce dung beetles if possible
- Create 'safe' pastures to use
- Cross grazing with other species
- Feed your horses off of the ground
- The correct use of chemical wormers

All this information is great, but what do I DO??

- Look at your horse's environment, and evaluate the risk of high population
- Make changes to minimize high environmental population e.g. increase manure collection, decrease stocking rates.
- Get a FECRT test done, to ensure the wormer you are using is effective
- Get regular (3 monthly) FEC's done to gain knowledge on the pattern of worm infestation for your particular environment.
- Use wormers strategically, when FEC's suggest a higher than normal worm burden, or strategic times of the year.
- FEC's should come with advice. Worming advice should take into consideration time of the year, previous worming, and worm burden history.