

## CONTROL OF EQUINE PARASITES

All horses host a wide range of internal parasites capable of causing many clinical problems such as colic, weight loss, diarrhoea, poor performance and even death.

It is widely accepted that 90% of all colic cases may have parasitism as an initiating or underlying cause. It is also acknowledged that problems such as drug resistance arise because worming drugs are administered too frequently. Most of these drugs are not bought from the veterinary surgeon and the dosing information is therefore often confusing and inaccurate. As a consequence, there is now widespread parasite resistance to many of the drugs in common use particularly the benzimidazole group.

The range of parasites has also changed and we now rarely see disease caused by the large redworms known as strongyles. We do however see many problems caused by a large family of worms, formally known as small strongyles but now renamed cyathostomes.

It is impossible to give detailed information that is applicable or relevant to all horse owners, as a worming programme involves both pasture management and drug administration, but the important of horse parasitism are outlined in below.

- The parasites live mostly in the horse's large intestine with free living larval stages on pasture which have hatched from eggs passed in the horse faeces.
- These infected larvae are swallowed by the horse during grazing
- Certain larvae can survive over winter on pasture
- Immature worms inside the horse undergo a period of migration and hibernation before maturation, during which time they are extremely hard to eliminate.
- Changing the worming drug annually is frequent enough as this time scale corresponds to the generation interval of the parasite and is less likely to lead to the development of resistance.
- Using several drugs during the year exposes the parent's generation to a variety of drugs and increases the likelihood of resistance in the offspring generation, ie it selects for a resistant population.
- The most effective way to control parasites is to collect droppings from the paddocks as this will remove the infected larvae.
- If faecal egg counting shows a high parasite burden and you are treating the horse to remove parasites that damage may have already occurred.



# ISLE VALLEY EQUINE CLINIC

- Rotating and resting paddocks and mixed grazing with sheep or cattle will also help to mop up parasites as they do not survive in species other than equines.
- Young horses are most vulnerable and should not graze with adult horses; they should also have first choice of “clean” pasture.
- Following worming horses should be stabled for 48 hours to ensure that all droppings and any parasites are collected and destroyed
- It is impossible to remove all parasites but small burden will not harm the horse.
- Routine faecal egg counts can be used to assess the worm burden and to determine the appropriate time to administer drugs. This method reduces the frequency and cost of worming and helps reduce the development of resistance in parasites. This is especially useful for big premises with a large number of horses.
- All worm control programmes should include spring and autumn treatment for tapeworms with drugs active against these parasites. Horses should be treated in December to remove stomach Bots.

For further details, please telephone or visit our website.

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