

WORMING STRATEGIES

CONTROL OF EQUINE PARASITES

The way we approach worming in horses has evolved considerably in recent years. The use of more and stronger anthelmintic drugs has fallen into disfavour, and a more strategic, targeted use of wormers is recommended.

All horses carry a range of internal parasites, and these may cause a variety of clinical problems such as weight loss, colic, poor performance and even death. In fact, the majority of colic cases may have parasites as an initiating cause. Unfortunately parasites can never be completely eradicated, so the aim is to keep worm burdens at a low, insignificant level. Surprisingly, not all horses interact with their parasites in the same way and less than 20% of the horses are responsible for more than 80% of the worms out there. It is also the case that young stock (and geriatric animals) may carry a much higher burden and can quickly contaminate the environment with large numbers of eggs and larvae.

Overuse and poor dosing with anthelmintics in the past has led to widespread resistance to some families of drugs. This, and the use of avermectins means that the range of worms that cause disease has changed. We no longer see illness due to large redworms, and instead have to deal with the small stringyles (cyathostomes). Treatment protocols will vary depending on individual circumstances, but the principles remain the same;

1. Monitoring of worm burdens
2. Targeted dosing
3. Pasture / environment management

The first of these is done by analysing faecal samples in the lab for the presence of eggs. This will identify those animals with high burdens, particularly those troublesome 20%. Neither tapeworms nor their eggs tend to show up in faecal analysis. There is a blood test to assess tapeworm levels if needed. Because of this it is usual to include a treatment against





tapeworms (praziquantel) in autumn and spring. An eggcupful of faeces is sufficient for lab analysis.



A low worm egg count may mean that your horse does not need any drug treatment – we can advise on treatment thresholds and also the best type of drug to use. It is best to use one type of drug through a year rather than chopping and changing ; this discourages the emergence of resistance.



Not many people have the luxury of acres of land that allows pasture rotation and cross-grazing with ruminants, but in an ideal world it is the aim to have horses rotated onto clean pasture (particularly young stock). Most of us therefore have to clean up our fields by poo-picking; this is a very effective way of reducing the parasite challenge.



A special note about small strongyles (cyathostomes). These can become clinically significant before ever reaching the egg-producing stage, and are particularly dangerous for young stock. It is therefore wise to treat for cyathostomes in the late autumn with moxidectin (Equest) regardless of worm egg counts. Equest is best reserved for this treatment and not used willy nilly. This will also clear the stomach of bot larvae that may have accumulated over the summer.



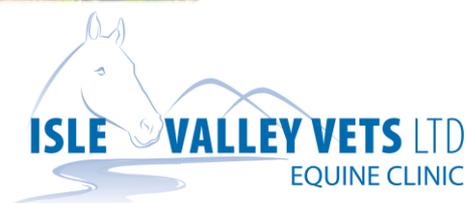
If you would like further information about this or any other equine services please contact our clinic at:



Isle Valley Equine Clinic
 Eleighwater
 Chard
 Somerset TA20 3AF



Tel: 01460 66099



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www.islevalleyvets.co.uk

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