

Tacoma Equine Hospital

3112 – 156th Street E. Tacoma, WA 98446 ♦ 253.535.6999

A Review of Internal Parasites and New Information

It's time to get acquainted with internal parasites again. You know those ugly worms that you so diligently try to eradicate every 8 weeks with paste dewormers. Well, they haven't gone away and as a matter of fact, they may get harder and harder to get rid of.

Internal parasites are silent killers. They can cause extensive internal damage and you may not even realize your horse is heavily infected. At the very least, parasites can lower resistance, rob your horse of valuable nutrients and cause gastrointestinal irritation and unthriftiness. At their worst, they can lead to colic, intestinal rupture and death.

There are more than 150 species of internal parasites that can infect horses. The most common and troublesome are large and small strongyles, roundworms and tapeworms. The lifecycle of most internal parasites involve eggs, larvae and adults. Eggs or larvae are deposited on the ground in the manure of an infected horse. They develop in the environment and eventually are swallowed while the horse is grazing, and the larvae mature into adults within the horse's digestive tract. With some species of parasite, the larvae migrate out of the intestine into other tissues or organs before returning to the intestine and maturing into egg-laying adults.

Some of the signs of infection with internal parasites are:

- Dull, rough haircoat
- Lethargy or depression
- Decreased stamina
- Unthriftiness or loss of condition
- Slowed growth of young horses
- Potbelly
- Colic
- Diarrhea

Developing a Deworming Program

Obviously, preventing your horses from being infected by internal parasites is an important goal. An effective deworming program won't necessarily get rid of all worms, but will keep the population in check, prevent illness in your horse, and keep pasture contamination down. There are 3 ways to accomplish this:

- ◆ Continuous deworming with a small dose of dewormer in your horse's ration daily
- ◆ Interval or Purge Deworming every 1, 2, or 3 months depending on your horse's living situation
- ◆ Strategic deworming which involves targeting administration based on fecal egg counts

There is no single deworming program that suits all horses and all situations. It is best to have your veterinarian help you devise an appropriate deworming program for you and your farm and monitor its success periodically with fecal egg counts. This is a microscopic exam of a sample of feces. This simple test will allow the veterinarian to determine which parasites are present, if

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any, and in what quantity. With this information we can evaluate the success of a given deworming program and change it if necessary.

Chemical Resistance / To Rotate or Not to Rotate

Whether or not to rotate dewormers (switch to a chemically different product every few months or every year) is a controversial topic. When the same or a chemically similar dewormer is used repeatedly for years, a population of parasites may be selected that is not susceptible to the dewormer. However rotating products too often could create strains of parasites that are resistant to multiple products. Whether or how often to rotate classes of dewormer is something you should discuss with your veterinarian.

Unfortunately, there are two things happening these days to make it harder to design an effective deworming program for our horses. There hasn't been a new class of deworming drug developed for 20 years and drug resistance has become evident for several species of parasites

Doing fecal egg counts before and after deworming will enable us to determine resistance of parasites to the compounds. If all egg laying adults haven't been killed, then eggs will still be present in the manure. A different dewormer should then be used and the manure tested again. In this way only effective drugs will be used and used sparingly. This is thought to be a way to control the parasites in horses while "saving" the efficacy of our limited deworming arsenal.

Prevention

Establishing a parasite control program also entails good management procedures. Both deworming programs and management of manure will relieve your horse of most parasites.

- ◆ Pick up and dispose of droppings in the pasture at least twice weekly
- ◆ Mow and harrow pastures regularly to expose parasite eggs and larvae to the elements
- ◆ Rotate pastures
- ◆ Group horses by age to reduce exposure to certain parasites and maximize the deworming program geared to that group
- ◆ Keep the number of horses to a minimum per acre to prevent overgrazing and fecal contamination
- ◆ Use a feeder for hay and grain or feed on mats
- ◆ Remove bot eggs quickly and regularly from your horse's hair