

WAGE WAR ON WORMS!

Sally Usher outlines a worming programme for the average horse...

The main objective of parasite control should be to prevent infection occurring, rather than just to focus on worm removal. If manure is removed from the paddock before the eggs have hatched – twice-weekly removal is recommended – infection cannot be passed on. Effective pasture control depends on the management of grazing to minimize egg and larval contamination.

Generally, if you adopt good grazing practices as above, it is adequate to worm once every three months (at the beginning of each season).

Talk to your vet about the ideal programme for your horses/ponies in their situation and decide whether a full drenching is advisable once or twice a year, with you doing the intervening worming with paste guns. Local climatic conditions and the age of the horse/pony are other factors to take in to account when planning and carrying out a worming programme.

Use a boticide (to combat bot fly larvae) annually at the start of winter; wait until after the first frost, which will kill any larvae on the grass. Ivermectin given orally will kill the adult worm in the stomach. Not all worming preparations are effective against bots, so it's important to make sure the right product is selected. Always check the packaging or ask your vet for advice on the best wormer for the job.

It is advisable to dose specifically for tapeworms twice a year, in spring and autumn, as well. Keep an accurate record of when your horse is wormed and with which product.

When choosing a wormer, check carefully to see which 'family' of drugs it comes from, and then vary the family to kill the full spectrum of worms and lessen the risk of resistance. Resistance is most likely to occur if the same drug is used continuously for a number of years and if there is under-dosing of the drug. Massey University Equine Hospital and Clinic recommends changing the type of wormer used every one to two years, but not more frequently, and to have a faecal egg count carried out 7-10 days after worming to check its effectiveness. You should do this once or twice a year.

It is important to make sure that your horse or pony receives the correct dose – it is easy to underestimate your horse's weight and, as a result, under-dose with wormer. If under-dosed, not all worms will be killed and there's the risk of the parasites developing a resistance to the drug. A special measuring tape can help correctly assess your horse's weight. A horse or pony kept in a well-maintained paddock will not need worming as often as a number of horses grazing together, so don't over dose either. Ask your vet to carry out a faecal egg count on a small sample of fresh manure to determine accurately whether your horse needs worming and whether your worming programme is effective. If your control programme is working well, the egg count will be low – between 100-200 eggs per gram of sample.

If your horse grazes with others it's important that all are wormed at the same time. If you are introducing a new horse, it needs worming



24 hours before it arrives on your property. Don't overstock your pasture as doing so forces animals to graze contaminated ground. When moving horses to a fresh paddock, worm 24-48 hours in advance so that the horses go clean on to the new pasture.

Adult cattle and sheep can be rotated through horse paddocks to 'clean up' and further minimize worm infestation as, with one exception, parasites of horses do not infect other animals, or vice versa. The one exception is a worm called *Trichostrongylus* that also lives in the intestines of sheep, cattle and goats.

If possible, it's ideal to rest your horse paddock for two to three weeks before introducing other stock to ensure any worm eggs have hatched. Then run your sheep or cattle in that paddock for at least a month to 'clean up'.

Limiting the time your horse spends in a paddock, rotating other stock through after the paddock has been rested, and the regular removal of manure helps lower infestation and will lead eventually to a reduction in the number of times you need to dose for worms annually. If you are thinking of reducing the frequency of worming, get a faecal egg count done just before the next dose is due.

Symptoms of worm infestation include diarrhoea, colic, weight loss and failing to thrive.

A word on harrows: a chain harrow used to break up and disperse manure around the paddock seems like the perfect solution to the more labour-intensive method of shovelling poo into a wheelbarrow. In hot dry summers harrowing can kill off the eggs and larvae by exposing them to the sun and wind, but given New Zealand's climatic conditions, harrowing can actually lead to increased contamination, so sadly is not recommended for reducing infestation.