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Worms and worming your horse!

Worming our horses is something that we all know we should be doing.... but how often, when and why is sometimes not as well known. Worms are a cause of disease in horses. They can cause colic, diarrhoea and weight loss and in certain circumstances can be fatal, although disease related to worms is fortunately much less common now that people regularly worm their horses.

Some of the main parasites horses can contract include -

- Pinworm: A worm that live in the rectum and lays eggs around the horses bottom at night, this can make your horses bottom very itchy!
- Roundworm: Big thick spaghetti like worms, more common in young horses, large burdens can actually block the bowel.
- Large and small strongyles: These nasty parasites are responsible for most of parasite related disease in horses. They can cause severe diarrhoea. They also migrate around in the abdomen and can cause very serious colic. Small strongyles are resistant to a lot of routine wormers.
- Lungworm: This worm lives in the lung and is common in horses paddock with donkeys.
- Tapeworm: Lives at the junction of the small and large bowel and can cause colic due to bowel contraction (intussuception) in this area.
- Bots: Are the larvae of the bot fly. Bot flies lay eggs on your horse, the horse ingests the eggs and the larvae develop in the stomach, can cause disease in high numbers. Removing bot eggs (yellow, usually on the legs) can help reduce transmission.

As well as worming there are several steps you can take to prevent worm transmission:

- Regularly clean and pick up manure in paddocks. Worms are transmitted by eggs in the horse faeces that are then ingested when the horse grazes or eats.
- Feed hay and hard feed in feeders not directly on the ground.
- Rotate paddocks to rest them and prevent large worm burdens building up. The best time to rest a paddock is in summer as the sun will kill off worm eggs. Rotational grazing with cattle or sheep can also help to reduce parasite burden as these species only share one worm species with horses, this type of grazing also improves pasture growth and reduced weeds as sheep and cattle graze differently to horses.

Obviously regular worming with a good quality wormer is extremely important in worm control.

Rules for worming are:

- Worm all horses in paddock together.
- If you suspect pinworm (itchy bottom) use Ammo wormer (contains morantal) fortnightly.
- Worm with an ivermectin base wormer every 6-8 weeks, unless you use Equest Plus which is registered every 14-16 weeks.
- Not all wormers treat tapeworm, check for praziquantal in the active ingredient list.
- Equest Plus (moxidectin) is the only wormer that kills most small strongyles. This, combined with its long duration of action and tapeworm control makes it a good routine wormer, unless you suspect pinworm.
- Once a year rotate your wormer to a product with a completely different (non ivermectin) base to prevent resistance building up.

If you have any questions please feel free to call us on 9739 5244