



Deworming in horses:

What every owner should know

Intestinal parasites (worms) are an unavoidable part of a horse's life. Every horse grazing pasture will pick up parasites at some stage. In small numbers, they may cause little harm, but when burdens increase or when young or stressed horses are affected, worms can lead to real health problems.

What problems can parasites cause?

Intestinal parasites can affect horses in different ways depending on the species and the number present. Often, the signs are subtle at first – a dull coat, loss of condition, mild, recurrent colic, or reduced performance. Some of the most important include:

- **Small strongyles (cyathostomins)** – the most common parasite. Larval stages can encyst in the gut wall and emerge in large numbers, causing severe diarrhoea, weight loss, colic and even death.
- **Tapeworms** – linked with spasmodic colic and irritation at the junction of the small and large intestine (ileocecal colic).
- **Ascarids (roundworms)** – mainly affect foals and young horses. Heavy burdens can cause poor growth, respiratory signs during larval migration, or intestinal obstruction.
- **Bots** – the larval stage of bot flies attach to the stomach lining and can contribute to gastric irritation.
- **Pinworms** – well known for causing intense itching around the tail head. Horses may rub their bottoms on fences or trees, leading to broken tail hair and skin irritation.

Why we don't worm as often as we used to?

In the past, horses were commonly wormed every 6 to 8 weeks. Unfortunately, this has led to widespread resistance to wormers, meaning some parasites now survive treatments that once worked well.

Modern parasite control focuses on targeted treatment, using testing and seasonal planning to protect both horse health and the effectiveness of available products.

A faecal egg count (FEC) is a simple test performed on a fresh manure sample. It tells us how many parasite eggs a horse is shedding onto the pasture.



Horses with clinical cyathostominosis can be thin despite a good appetite, and have diarrhoea and low protein levels.



Ascarids removed from the intestinal tract of a foal



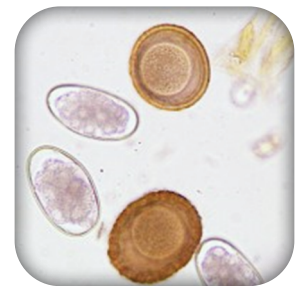
Dr Chloe Traill
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This helps us:

- Identify horses that genuinely need treatment
- Avoid unnecessary drenching in low-risk horses
- Monitor whether wormers are still effective
- Build a parasite control plan tailored to your property

Some adult horses naturally carry very low burdens and may only need minimal worming each year.

Even with targeted programmes, most adult horses benefit from one key treatment in autumn. Products containing moxidectin and praziquantel are commonly recommended at this time. This seasonal treatment helps reduce parasite build-up over winter.



Strongyle and ascarid eggs seen on FEC under the microscope

What can you do at home?

Good pasture hygiene can significantly reduce worm exposure:

- Regular manure removal from paddocks
- Avoiding overstocking
- Rotating grazing where possible
- Quarantining and testing new arrivals

- Seeking veterinary advice for young horses or those losing condition

Frequent routine drenching is no longer best practice. Targeted worming guided by faecal egg counts, combined with at least one well-timed autumn treatment, is the most effective way to protect horse health and preserve the usefulness of worming products.

We do FECs. Ask us.