



## **EQUINE WORM CONTROL**

There are a number of different worm infestation symptoms, varying from barely detectable reduction in performance through to severe disease, illness, colic and in extreme cases even death. Signs of worm infestation can include but are not limited to, poor growth, weight loss, tail rubbing, scouring, coughing, colic and death.

There are a number of worms that infest horses. The most important being large red worms (large strongyles), small red worms (small strongyles), threadworms and large round worms with pinworms, tapeworms and bots being less dangerous.

### ***Small Red Worms***

Also known as Small Strongyles (cyathostomes) are common and cause direct damage to the gut wall. It is the small red worm in its immature stages that can encyst into the wall of the intestine. This is like hibernation as the larvae are not active and can remain in the intestine wall for months. The problem is that at this stage the larvae are resistant to anthelmintics (worming pastes) so large numbers can build up in the gut wall over time.

The biggest problem occurs when these encysted larvae are stimulated to wake up and complete their life cycle by emerging into the intestine lumen. Huge numbers of cyathostomes migrate out of the gut wall causing tremendous damage, resulting in weight loss, illness, anaemia, colic, diarrhoea and even death.

Prevention is difficult due to resistance from long term inappropriate use of wormers and there are only two products on the market which can prevent and kill encysted strongyles (as far as I am aware).

### ***Large Red Worms***

Also known as large strongyles, these worms invade the blood vessels supplying the intestines and can cause serious damage leading to colic, diarrhoea and even death.

### ***Roundworms***

Generally only effect horses 2 years old or younger, they cause intestinal blockages, diarrhoea, and even respiratory problems.

### ***Pinworms***

Adult pin worms lay their eggs around the horse's anus causing irritation and the most common symptom is "tail rubbing".

### ***Tapeworms***

An adult tapeworm consists of a head that attaches to the intestinal wall with a set of suckers and a segmented body; each segment contains within it a complete set of

reproductive organs that can produce eggs independently. As the worm grows, the lower segments separate and their eggs are carried off in the passing stream of digesting food on their way out of the horse's body. Once on the ground, the manure is broken down with the help of oribatid mites; the mites ingest the eggs, which develop into larvae inside their bodies. If the larvae-carrying mites crawl up onto the grass and are eaten by a grazing horse, the tapeworm larvae will settle into a new host.

Tapeworms can cause colic, weight loss, diarrhoea, gut rupture and death.

### ***Bots***

The adult bot is actually a fly that lays eggs on the horse's coat (mostly legs). These eggs hatch into larvae and are ingested into the horse's stomach, where they can cause ulceration and may even penetrate the wall of the stomach. Bots are very common in hot climates.

### ***How to tell if your horse has a worm infestation***

The telltale signs are: weight loss, dull coat, bloated belly, diarrhoea and colic but prevention is better than cure and to maintain your horse's health it is important to establish a regular worming program and stick to it.

### ***Worm control program***

An effective worm control program is to remove all worms from your horse by using a wormer that will kill everything - including encysted stages - remembering that not many of the wormers on the market actually kill and prevent encysted stages.

You must maintain a worming program every 6-8 weeks without going over 8 weeks. To prevent resistance you must change the class of drench you are using every 12 months (not just the brand but the actual class of drench). Limit reinfestation by removing manure, cleaning paddocks and you could even monitor worm burdens by conducting worm tests.

### ***Our worming program***

As the president of Save a Horse Australia Rescue and Sanctuary, worm infestation is something we see regularly with surrendered and slaughter bound horses.

The worming program that I use is one that has worked well for us over the years and we make sure that all new owners are aware of worming scheduled for each horse adopted.

On arrival we put all horses on a 5 day course of Panacur 100 (10ml to 100kg body weight). Panacur's active ingredient is Fenbendazole, however it doesn't cover encysted stages, threadworm, tapeworms or bots.

Subsequently, 1 week later, we drench the horse with Equest Plus Tape Long Acting (Active ingredient is Moxidectin Praziquantel). This dewormer is the only one on the market (that I am aware of) which kills everything including encysted stages. It is always important to use a less invasive wormer such as Panacur 100 (which is over a 5 day period) first, before using Equest Plus (high one off dose) on a horse which has a severe case of worm infestation to prevent colic.

### ***In conclusion***

Keeping your horse worm free is an important part of horse husbandry and with horses only needing to be drenched every 6-8 weeks there are no excuses for not maintaining a worm control program.

If you suspect your horse has a worm infestation and the drench you are using isn't working, call your vet for a check up to establish the problem.

This article is not a substitute for professional veterinarian advice.

Written by

**Amanda Vella**

President,  
Save A Horse Horse Rescue & Sanctuary



***Honey Megs - suffering from a large worm burden when she was rescued***