



ARE YOU BUYING THE RIGHT HORSE WORMER?

In late 2014 the results of Australia's largest equine parasite prevalence survey were revealed. The study aimed to confirm the prevalence of four key internal parasites of horses, all potentially deadly.

The study was conducted by researchers from the University of Queensland (UQ). Faecal samples were sourced from a total of 102 properties scattered up and down the country, from Far North Queensland, down into Tassie and across to South Australia. Faecal samples were only taken from horses that had not received a worming treatment in the past 8 weeks.

The most alarming finding was that ALL the properties surveyed had small strongyles, commonly known as 'cyathostomes' or 'redworms'.



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Since horses began to be wormed more frequently in 1970s, detection of the large strongyle or bloodworm has diminished significantly and the most dangerous group of intestinal parasites for the adult horse today are the small strongyles. Whilst many horses can carry these worms without ill-effect, high burdens may cause a dull coat, weight loss, diarrhoea and a pot-bellied appearance. Colic may also be a symptom of a high burden of small strongyles.

One of the most frightening syndromes linked to small strongyles is due to the build-up of large numbers of 'encysted stages' in the gut wall. The 'encysted stage' of these parasites is unique among equine worms. These dormant worms act as a reservoir for repopulation of the more mature stages within the gut cavity if the adults are suddenly removed via wormer administration.

If the encysted stages all break out of the gut wall simultaneously then a disease called 'larval cyathostominosis' can occur which has a fatality rate of up to 50%. This syndrome is characterised by profuse diarrhoea, weight loss, anaemia, dehydration and protein loss.

WHAT ELSE DID THE STUDY FIND?

The full list of worms found is in the table 1. The large strongyle mentioned earlier is still found on 7.8% of the properties surveyed but the good news is that worming at least twice a year with a product labelled to kill this parasite should keep it under control.

Tapeworm was found on only 3.9% of properties so it seems that the addition of praziquantel to most horse wormers has kept this potential nasty to very low levels. Once again, a couple of times a year is probably sufficient to control tapeworms.

A worm that is of particular danger to foals is the 'ascarid' or large roundworm and this worm was found on one third of all farms with young horses. This means that if you have a breeding establishment you probably should get your vet to test some faecal samples to check for ascarids, and discuss a control program specifically for ascarids with your vet if they are detected.

TABLE 1.

Equine Parasites Found	Incidence on Australian farms
Small Strongyles (Cyathostomins)	100%
<i>Parascaris equorum</i> (Ascarids) (on all farms)	14.7%
<i>Parascaris equorum</i> (on farms with horses aged <2yr)	34.1%
<i>Strongylus vulgaris</i> (Large Strongyles)	7.8%
Tapeworm	3.9%

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

The 100% prevalence of small strongyles suggest that these worms should be the main target of any worming program, especially in adult horses. The most dangerous aspect of the small strongyle life-cycle is the ability to encyst in the wall of the gut. If you regularly use a wormer that targets those encysted stages then you will minimise the impact of these potentially deadly parasites.

Equest Plus Tape is the only wormer in Australia that controls the deadly encysted stages of the small strongyle with a single dose. Using this broad spectrum wormer regularly will also control the other nasties found in the study.

The manufacturer recommends that ALL adult horses receive at least two doses of Equest Plus Tape per year, one in early spring and another in early autumn. At other times of the year they recommend targeting those horses that show high egg counts in their faeces. You can ask your produce store or your vet about getting egg counts done for your horses.

KEY POINTS

100% of properties surveyed had small strongyles

34% of properties with horses under 2yo had ascarids

Tapeworm and large strongyles were less prevalent

Equest Plus Tape is the most effective wormer to control the small strongyle

Only Equest Plus Tape kills the 'encysted' small strongyle in a single dose

