



VET'S STALL

Planning Parasite Control

FIND A DEWORMING PROGRAM THAT IS SUITED TO YOUR SITUATION.

Guest Columnist

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All of us realize that deworming our horses is necessary and we do a conscientious job. The goal of this article is to assure that the medication you are giving your horse is chosen and timed to give you the most effective program possible.

The horse with a dull hair coat and unthrifty appearance is easy to spot and treat. The problem is that most horses suffer from lowered resistance to disease; weakened performance, growth and development; loss of valuable nutrients and permanent damage to internal organs before the owner recognizes the worm problem. Internal parasites can cause colic and death. Establishing effective parasite control and good feeding practices has significantly reduced the number of colic cases we see each year.

I see three types of deworming programs in my area.

DAILY DEWORMING

The first is a continuous feeding of a daily dewormer year-round. This program needs a purge worming to be done at the beginning of feeding the daily dewormer, and a seasonal administration of a boticide. Bots are insect larvae, and are not killed by the active ingredient in daily wormers. The advantage of this program is it reduces fecal egg counts and so limits the contamination of pastures. It also keeps worms from developing in the horse.

An incredible misconception I run across is that a deworming product protects the horse for six to twelve weeks. This is not true! That deworming medicine you buy and give your horse is only in its system for 18 to 48 hours. It kills the worms that are there and is gone. Now your horse picks up and develops worms for the next six to twelve weeks until you deworm him again and kill the adult worms.

That brings up another aspect of parasite control we need to clarify. Parasites have several stages in their life cycle. The egg is out in your pasture and in the stool of the horse. Some worms, such as strongyles, have a larval stage that actually climbs up on the grass and is eaten by your horse. Bots lay their eggs on the horse and the horse eats them when they groom.

OK, so now the worm is in your horse. The egg hatches and a larval stage migrates through the intestinal wall and travels through the horse's system, including the lungs, liver, etc., and causes damage. Now it continues to develop through four stages and returns to the intestine to live as an adult and lay eggs. You

give a dewormer to kill these adults and stop egg production and the drain on your horse.

A daily dewormer does this every day. It does not get absorbed into the horse's blood stream to kill migrating larva. There are wormers that can do this. Please consult with your veterinarian on the products that are safe and appropriate for your horse.

INTERVAL DEWORMING

The second deworming program is interval deworming. A worm develops in six weeks. After six weeks you can have adult worms. It is a linear building condition and so periodic deworming starting at six weeks and working outward keeps worm burdens at a tolerable level.

Remember, your horse has an immune system that tries to deal with infections and parasites. Your foal doesn't stand a chance if it is born into an environment with heavy parasite contamination. You need to deworm regularly. Start early and give dewormer at least every six weeks. Some protozoan parasites can develop in your foal in seven days. Bacterial and viral infections develop in just a few days. Keep that foaling area clean.

I like to keep the mare free of parasites and foal in a clean stall. Unfortunately, even mares with zero fecal egg counts can have parasites in a hypobiotic (dormant), encysted form in their bodies. They can be shed and transmitted directly from the mare to the foal. To get rid of these, you just have to worm the foal.

STRATEGIC DEWORMING

The third program is strategic deworming. Here farm managers have the veterinarian monitor fecal egg counts and choose deworming products to get the worms they need to worry about. This does work well to break resistance problems that can develop to a particular drug. Strategic deworming is also used with daily programs to get bots.

As you can tell, I am not suggesting that one program suits all horse-farm situations. Your regular veterinarian is able to advise you on how to develop a deworming program that will be safe and effective.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Now for you that are really into this, I will discuss some of the parasites we are after.

There are more than 150 species of internal parasites that infect horses. Large and small strongyles (bloodworms), ascarids (roundworms), tapeworms, lungworms, pinworms, threadworms and bots are the most common in Minnesota.

● **Strongyles** cause anemia, diarrhea, weight loss, poor growth and colic. Colic from worms is caused by a blockage of blood flow to the intestine. It can require surgery to remove that sec-

tion of intestine, or the horse will die.

- **Ascarids**, or roundworms, cause impactions, colic, pneumonia, pot belly, rough coat and poor condition.
- **Tapeworms** cause similar problems and are resistant to most deworming products. Some types of tapeworm have an intermediate host, a mite that the horse eats on grass, hay and grain.
- **Pinworms** can cause your horse to rub its tail.
- **Lungworms** cause lung problems, coughing, etc.
- **Bots** cause ulcers of the stomach and mouth. You see this little bee-like fly laying yellow eggs on the hair of your horse. Try to remove these eggs when you see them.

You can do a lot by rotating pastures. This way the worm eggs get burned up in the sun instead of eaten by your horse. Winter does not destroy worm eggs. Harrow your pastures to break up manure piles and expose worm eggs to sun. Clean up stools. Keep the number of horses per acre to a minimum. Do not spread manure on pastures. Compost manure to heat and kill worm eggs. Keep foals and weanlings on separate pasture from adult horses.

Remove bot eggs from your horse regularly. Do not feed on the ground. Use feeders for hay and grain. Use a good deworming program adjusted for your farm. Enjoy your healthy horse.

— Dr. Jeff Johnson 🐾

Dr. Johnson is a veterinarian with Blue Sky Animal Hospital in Wyoming, Minn., and an avid horseman. For more animal-care information, visit Blue Sky's web site at www.blueskyanimal.com.

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