



The Three “Rights” of Deworming Adult Horses

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Now, more than ever, it is critical to take an active role in the parasite control process. Your farm is unique, which means your horses and their parasite burdens are unique and may benefit from management solutions that go beyond chemical parasite control strategies.

The goal of a strategic deworming program is not to eradicate all parasites from all horses on the farm. It is to reduce the parasite burden in each horse so that they remain healthy. The only way to effectively accomplish this goal using the deworming products available is to employ the help of your veterinarian and take a science-based approach to identify the “right horse” and give him the “right dewormer” at the “right time.”

1. The right horse

There is no one-size-fits-all deworming program. Each horse’s age, exposure and environment must be taken into consideration in determining his parasite risk and deworming protocol.

Because approximately 20 percent of the adult horses shed 80 percent of the parasite eggs on a farm, fecal egg counts (FEC) should be conducted by your veterinarian to identify which horses are actually shedding the parasite eggs.¹ Horses should then be categorized according to their level of shedding as “low,” “moderate,” or “high,” as designated in the AAEP Parasite Control Guidelines.¹

2. The right dewormer

Some level of parasite resistance has been documented for every dewormer on the market and that resistance varies greatly by geographic location, as well as by parasite.¹ A way to determine if parasitic resistance to a particular dewormer exists on a particular farm is to have a veterinarian perform a fecal egg count reduction test. First a fecal egg count (FEC) is performed prior to deworming a horse, then a second fecal egg count test is performed 10-14 days later on the same horse. The pre-deworming and post-deworming FEC results are compared to determine if parasites are resistant to the dewormer used.

3. The right time

Ideally, deworming should be conducted on the “right horse” at the “right time” based on its parasite egg shedding level. Adult horses that are low egg shedders (based on their FEC) may need to be treated 2 times a year, whereas a high shedder may need 3 or 4 treatments a year.

For the low egg shedder, deworming during peak parasite transmission based on your geographic location might be sufficient.

These guidelines apply to the moderate egg shedders, as well, but your veterinarian may recommend a third treatment for these horses.

Horses that are high egg shedders should get the above recommendations, as well as one additional (non-larvicidal) treatment during the main season of larval transmission (typically summer) and a second non-larvicidal treatment during the “off-season” (typically winter) in your area.

Parasites that threaten equine health

Having a basic understanding of the parasites that can be a risk to your horse can help you better navigate the three “rights” of deworming.

- **Ascarids** (roundworms) are the primary threat to young horses. Infective ascarid eggs are ingested by the horse and immature ascarid larvae migrate through the liver and lungs before arriving in the small intestine where they will mature to adults.
- **Small strongyles** (cyathostomes) are considered the primary parasite problem in adult horses today. They burrow and encyst in the lining of the large intestine and can stay there for years evading the effects of most dewormers. Eggs are laid in the pasture and hatched larvae are ingested by the horse.
- **Large strongyles** (bloodworms) used to be the greatest threat to horses. Although their role has lessened, they can still cause problems. The larval stages are ingested on pasture and migrate through the walls of certain abdominal arteries resulting in inflammation and blood clots that can block circulation to the large intestines or result in rupture of the arteries. These parasites can also damage the liver and other internal organs.
- **Pinworms** are a cause of tail rubbing since the female lays her eggs in the perianal region.
- **Tapeworms** require an intermediate host. The eggs passed in the stool are ingested by a mite and the tapeworm undergoes development within the mite. The horse ingests the mite while grazing and the cycle continues with the tapeworm maturing. It is difficult to confirm the presence of tapeworms even with regular fecal exams.

Take-Home Message

Clear as mud? If all this information has you scratching your head, meanwhile your horse is still out in the pasture scratching their tail, never fear! By employing your veterinarian’s guidance, you can take a scientific approach to making sure you are deworming the right horse at the right time with the right product.

¹ AAEP Parasite Control Guidelines ([revised 2021](#))

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION: Consult your veterinarian for the diagnosis, treatment, and control of parasitism. Do not use in horses intended for human consumption.