

Worms in Horses

Types of Worms Found in Horses

When it comes to our equine friends, worms can be a real concern. There's a variety of internal parasites that can hitch a ride in your horse's system throughout their lives. While a few worms may not cause much trouble, a heavy infestation can lead to some serious health issues, and without treatment, it can even be life-threatening. So, let's dive into the world of horse worms and learn how to keep our furry companions safe!

A Quick Note: It's always best to reach out to your veterinarian or a qualified person (SQP) to set up a targeted worming program tailored for your horse. And don't forget to manage your pasture well to cut down on those pesky worm eggs!



The Main Players: Five Common Types of Worms in Horses

1. Large Redworms (Strongyles)

Large redworms, often called strongyles, are the big players living in your horse's large intestine. They lay their eggs, which are then passed out with droppings and fall onto the pasture, ready to be ingested by unsuspecting horses. Once inside, these eggs transform into larvae that burrow into the walls of the arteries that supply blood to the intestines. This can lead to blockages, serious bleeding, and even colic.

Watch Out For:

- Weight loss
- A bloated stomach
- Dull appearance
- Diarrhoea
- Colic

Treatment: A simple faecal worm egg count can reveal if your horse has a heavy load of large redworms. If the count is medium to high, your vet will likely recommend a dewormer containing ivermectin.

2. **Small Redworms (Cyathostomins)**

Small redworms are the most prevalent parasites among horses. These guys feast on the intestinal tissue, causing damage that can hinder your horse's nutrient absorption, leading to weight loss and poor overall health. They're also notorious for triggering spasmodic colic, which can be fatal if ignored.

Look For:

- Weight loss
- Bloated stomach
- Dull coat
- Diarrhoea
- Colic

Encysted redworms are their sneaky larval stage, burrowing into the gut wall and lying dormant until winter ends or stress triggers them. When they wake up in large numbers, they can cause serious problems.

Treatment: Your vet can detect encysted redworms through a blood test and will typically recommend a dewormer with moxidectin if needed.

3. **Tapeworms**

There are three species of tapeworm that can be a nuisance for horses. These guys like to hang out at the junction of the small and large intestine, where they can irritate the gut lining. If there are too many of them, they might cause impaction colic by blocking food passage, leading to a variety of issues including diarrhoea and weight loss.

Signs Include:

- Weight loss
- Impaction
- Spasmodic colic

Tapeworms release eggs in segments that are passed out in droppings, relying on oribatid mites to spread. Horses can pick up these eggs while grazing.

Treatment: A saliva test is needed to detect tapeworms. If necessary, your vet may recommend a dewormer that contains either pyrantel or praziquantel.

4. **Roundworms (Ascarids)**

These large, white worms can grow up to 40 cm long and are mostly found in foals and young horses. Their presence can lead to inflammation or obstruction in the intestines,

resulting in constipation or diarrhoea. They can also cause issues in the lungs due to migrating larvae.

Symptoms:

- Poor growth
- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Coughing
- Pot belly

Treatment: A faecal worm egg count can identify roundworms, and if the count is high, your vet will likely recommend a pyrantel-based dewormer.

5. **Pinworms**

While pinworms aren't usually dangerous, they can cause significant irritation around your horse's rear, leading to some serious rubbing and skin infections. These worms hatch from eggs ingested from contaminated surfaces and live harmlessly in the intestines until the females exit to lay eggs around the anus.

Look For:

- Loss of condition
- Inflamed skin around the tail
- Itching and restlessness

Treatment: Since pinworm eggs don't typically show up on fecal tests, a sticky tape test can help detect them. Getting rid of these pesky critters requires a combination of deworming and thorough cleaning of the environment, especially around places where horses tend to rub.

6. **Bots**

Interestingly, bots are actually flies rather than worms! They usually don't cause significant harm but can occasionally lead to some issues. Bots lay their pale yellow

eggs on a horse's legs and, once hatched, the larvae can be ingested or crawl to the



mouth, burrowing into the gums.

Symptoms Can Include:

- Dry coat
- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Inflammation around the mouth
- Colic

If left unchecked, bots can lead to more severe problems like mouth inflammation and stomach ulcers.

Treatment: The best defence against bots is prevention! Use fly sprays and sheets to keep them away, and regularly remove eggs with a bot knife. Consult your vet about the right time to treat your horse with ivermectin or moxidectin, usually after the first frost.

By keeping a close eye on your horse's health and being proactive about worming, you can help ensure they stay happy and healthy. Always consult your vet for personalised advice tailored to your horse's needs!