



Ark Vet Centre

Equine Newsletter



☀ July 2025 ☀

Welcome to the July Newsletter, with the continued mild and warm weather we have been having flies, lice, ticks continue to be a problem as well as some skin problems especially burns from buttercups. We are also just hitting peak ragwort season with the flowers springing up all over the place. It's a plant that can cause serious effects on our horses and ponies and requires good management to eliminate from your fields.

Ragwort Poisoning

Ragwort plants are biennial, so they take two years to fully grow and flower. They start off as small green cabbage like rosettes and can eventually reach one metre tall. The clusters of small yellow flowers will bloom between July and October.

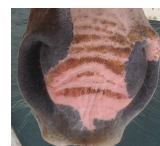


The entire plant - flowers, leaves, root and stem - are poisonous. It is bitter tasting and not usually eaten by horses who have access to sufficient grazing. The concern lies when pastures are over grazed and the horses do not have acceptable forage. If this happens the horses may be more inclined to eat it. Plants or leaves that have been pulled out and left to dry are still poisonous and can be even more dangerous as they become more palatable, less bitter and more likely to be eaten.

Ragwort contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids which cause liver damage resulting in liver disease and death. There is no known cure once poisoned. If the horse ingests it in small doses the damage will have the same cumulative effect as eating it in a large amount. Due to the type of damage in the liver cells, the liver will not be able to regenerate.

Clinical signs

- * Colic, loss of appetite, depression
- * Diarrhoea
- * Skin Photosensitisation (similar to sunburn)
- * Weight loss
- * Yawning, head pressing
- * Jaundice (yellow mucus membranes)
- * Lack of coordination / wobbliness



Treatment/Prevention

Treatment is rarely successful but if liver failure has not developed, then supportive care can be given such as fluids

Once a plant flowers, it will produce thousands of seeds which are very easily spread in the wind. The best method of control is by pulling the entire plant from the root before it blooms.

To remove ragwort, gloves should be worn as it is harmful to humans too as the toxins can be absorbed by the skin and cause liver damage. With the use of a rag fork, pull out as much of the plant and root as possible and make sure there aren't any leaves left behind. Seeds can lie dormant for as long as 20 years, so even after removal, it's a good idea to keep checking that there aren't any new plants growing. You must dispose of ragwort properly by burning.

