



Ark Vet Centre

Equine Newsletter



March 2025



Welcome to the March newsletter, the past few days have felt like spring is in the air and summer is on the way! I'm sure many of you are looking forward to ride out and show season as its just around the corner! The lighter nights and mornings are also making such a difference!

Encysted Red Worm

Over the past few weeks we have seen some colic cases that have also had high temperatures. These cases have often grumbled on for a few days and have not responded immediately to usual colic treatments. Due to this we have taken blood samples and had them tested for signs of encysted red worm—all of which have come back as suggestive of encysted red worm and subsequently have been treated with wormers and the horses have improved. Here we will discuss red worm in more detail:

Red Worms

Small redworm or Cyathostomins have a very quick lifecycle (as little as 5-6 weeks) and reproduce in large numbers. 95% of parasite burdens found in horses are small redworm. As well as large populations of adult redworm being problematic to the horse, cyathostomes also have an unusual developmental stage, where the larvae burrow into the horse's gut wall and encyst with the potential of causing serious consequences when they re-emerge. The small redworm is up to 2.5cm long, thin and usually reddish in colour.



Symptoms

- Loss of condition or weight loss
- Anaemia
- Distended stomach
- Dull coat
- Diarrhoea
- Colic

Long term, small redworm infestation can seriously damage the intestinal wall, reducing the horse's ability to absorb nutrients. The horse may become a chronic 'bad doer', and in some cases, a severe infestation can be fatal. Conversely it is also possible for a horse to appear perfectly healthy while carrying a significant worm burden.

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Encysted stages

Larval stages of the worm burrow into the gut wall of the large intestine and become encysted.

Some continue to develop within the gut wall, re-emerging soon after to become adult egg laying worms residing in the large intestine.

Other larvae stay encapsulated for months or years within the horse's gut wall, lying in a dormant state known as encysted larvae. Tens of thousands of these encysted larvae can line the intestine, where they impair absorption of nutrients, resulting in possible weight loss and life-threatening illness.

Here they wait until conditions, such as a change in season from winter to spring, triggers a 'mass emergence' from the gut wall. This activity can cause life-threatening bowel inflammation, known as colitis in the horse.

It is this emergence that can cause colic symptoms and often a high temperature, and we tend to see multiple cases around the same time usually after a sudden change in weather temperature, hence why we've seen these cases recently.

Treatment

The only treatment that is effective against encysted redworm is Moxidectin (Equest / Equest Pramox). Encysted red worms also will not be detected on a standard faecal worm egg count, a blood sample is required to diagnose it. If your horse has had regular faecal egg counts throughout the year that have been low then your horse is an ideal candidate for the encysted red worm blood sample. If you do this alongside the tapeworm test it means we can worm more specifically and only for the worms we need to worm against and it may even mean your horse will not need wormed at all that year. Otherwise we are advising dosing with a wormer that's effective for encysted red worm once per year over the winter. Below is a table with advised worming / egg count schedules:

Spring	Worm egg count	Saliva test for tapeworm
Summer	Worm egg count	
Autumn	Worm egg count	Saliva test for tapeworm
Winter	Blood test if low egg counts year round or worm for possible encysted red worm + tapeworm if required.	

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