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DO HORSES NEED WORMING?

Yes. Horses are prone to infestation with several different types of worms including small and large strongyles, pinworms, threadworms, bots, tapeworms and ascarid/round worms. Heavy worm burdens can cause many serious problems including weight loss, anaemia (blood loss) and colic.

How often should I worm my horse(s)?

The answer is it depends! If large numbers of horses are kept close together and/or horses are frequently moved on and off your property, these horses should be wormed every 6-8 weeks. Horses in less intensively stocked situations should be wormed at least every 3 months.

All horses on a property should be wormed at the same time. New horses introduced to a property should be quarantined and wormed before running with the other horses.

Paddock management such as manure removal, paddock rotation and grazing with other species will help lower the risk of worm contamination.

Active ingredients

There are two main classes of active ingredients in horse wormers – the ‘mectin’-based products (such as ivermectin, abamectin and moxidectin) and the ‘azole’-based products (also called BZ products; such as oxfendazole).

Twenty or so years ago, the ‘mectins’ became the drug of choice for horse worming products but continued use of this same active ingredient increases the likelihood of the development of resistance to the mectins. Resistance to mectin drenches has already occurred in sheep and cattle – to prevent the same problem occurring with horses, it is important to rotate your horse wormer correctly.

How often should I change my wormer/drench?

Changing wormer means changing the active ingredient, not just the box colour or manufacturer. Changing wormers every time you worm is no longer considered the best approach – this can actually promote the development of resistance.

The best approach is known as the **slow rotation approach:**

- Use a mectin-based product for an entire year
- Switch to an azole-based product and use it for the entire next year
 - BUT you still need to use a mectin-based product in May and August (before and after winter) in order to kill bots and tapeworms

Can I test my horse for worms?

Yes – bring in a faecal sample from your horse and we can send it to the laboratory for analysis – the lab will identify the number and type of worms so we can make sure we are treating your horse appropriately.

Next steps

To help you keep track of your worming (and other important horse health details such as vaccinations, farrier visits etc), Virbac have launched an iphone app called “**My Strapper**” (unfortunately I don’t think it is available on Google Play for non-Apple users).

There are a bewildering array of horse wormers available in paste and pellet forms but the active ingredients fall into one of the two chemical families discussed earlier. If you have any questions about worming your horse, please come in and see the friendly team at Cowra Veterinary Centre.

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