

Equine Deworming: New Rules for an Old Game

We all know the routine. Pick up a new dewormer every other month, and your horse will be free of parasites. Not so in this day and age.

Thanks to the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) guidelines and independent research from the last few years, we know that a seasonal, age appropriate, individualized approach is best for your horse – and could save you money.

As noted in a recent article, millions of tubes of dewormer are being administered to horses every year that are killing very few parasites either because there are very few worms in the horse to kill or because the drug is ineffective as a result of resistance.¹ Decades of repeated deworming treatments have led to active ingredient resistance in small strongyle and ascarid populations, the two key parasites of concern for horses.² Rather than frequent deworming treatments, effective and properly timed treatments are needed.

Effective Active Ingredients

For effective treatment, it is vital that horse owners know which parasite(s) their horse is infected with and which deworming product effectively treats the parasite.

The key parasite in adult horses, small strongyles, are universally present in all grazing horses.² The primary concern of small strongyles occurs during the encysted stage of its life cycle, where the parasite burrows in the walls of the lower intestines and inflammation is caused when the parasite emerges from this "cyst" stage.

“Moxidectin is the only deworming active ingredient that has shown to be effective in treating encysted small strongyles, which are strongyles in the larval stage, in a single dose,”³ says Kenton Morgan, DVM, Equine Technical Services, Zoetis.

There is a consecutive five day dose regimen that claims to be effective against encysted small strongyles, but recent data indicates there is a growing small strongyle resistance to fenbendazole.³

It is also important to keep in mind that while the available deworming products may all look different, many brands contain the same active, parasite-killing ingredient. So even though the products have different names, you may be using the same active ingredient, and overexposure to the same active ingredient could be leading to parasite resistance. That's why it's important to read the packaging and look for the active ingredient, often found in parenthesis below the brand name.

Parasite Seasonality

Deworming treatments must also be properly timed during the year, corresponding with your horse's parasite burden and the parasite's cycles of transmission, typically spring and fall.²

Ascarids, also known as roundworms, are hardy parasites resistant to environmental influences. They are the key parasite of concern in young horses as older horses develop an immunity to them.² However, in foals, ascarids can cause poor growth, airway inflammation and small intestinal impactions.²

"There are three products that perform best when targeting ascarids," says Dr. Morgan. "The active ingredients to look for are pyrantel pamoate, oxbendazole or fenbendazole."

Engage Your Veterinarian

The most important tool in your parasite arsenal is your veterinarian. They can perform a fecal egg count (FEC) test to determine which horses in your herd need treatment and which don't. Once you have a baseline established, they can work with you to develop an [Individualized Deworming™](#) program.

MYTH BUSTER:
You want the best for your horse, so you should always buy the dewormer labeled Max, Gold or Plus.

FALSE: Using a product labeled as Max, Gold or Plus does not mean the dewormer lasts longer, is stronger, has more carrot flavor or includes special nutrients. In most cases, the added word and expense translates to the addition of one active ingredient: praziquantel.

Praziquantel specifically targets tapeworms. Tapeworm treatment is recommended by the AAEP once a year, in the late fall or winter after tapeworm transmission ends due to cold weather.² So using Max, Gold or Plus products any other time of the year may be a waste of money, unless your horse has never before been treated for tapeworms or there is evidence of a local problem.

“All horses do not carry the same parasite burden. Usually in a herd, 80 percent of the parasite burden is hosted by 20 percent of the horses,”¹ says Dr. Morgan. “High strongyle shedders are responsible for the majority of parasite transmission.”

Your veterinarian can also test your horse or herd to see if the dewormer you used was effective. A fecal egg count reduction test (FECRT) will show if your horses have parasites that have become resistant to a specific active ingredient. This test is done after your horse or herd has been treated. Your veterinarian can then help you select additional treatment options if necessary.

Visit IDMyHorse.com or download the [EQStable app](#) to answer a few questions about your horse and input his FEC shedding level to help develop an Individualized Deworming treatment plan.

¹ Kaplan, R.M., Nielsen, M.K., 2010. An evidence-based approach to equine parasite control: It ain't the 60s anymore. *Equine Veterinary Education* 22, 306-316.

² American Association of Equine Practitioners. AAEP Parasite Control Guidelines. Available at: <http://www.aaep.org/info/parasite-control-guidelines>. Accessed January 29, 2016.

³ Mason ME, Voris ND, Ortis HA, Geeding AA, Kaplan RM. Comparison of a single dose of moxidectin and a five-day course of fenbendazole to reduce and suppress cyathostomin fecal egg counts in a herd of embryo transfer-recipient mares. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2014;245(8):944-951.