South Willamette Veterinary Clinic Newsletter

Parasite Control Programs **January 2014**

January 2014 Equine newsletter

We hope you and all your animal friends survived the big snow and extreme cold. There are a couple of topics of interest to consider as we start the New Year.

Cautions regarding strategic deworming

It has become common in our area to deworm our horses based primarily on the premise of 'evidence based or strategic deworming'. The use of this methodology the last few years was a radical departure from the older traditional methods of interval deworming when anthelmintic pastes were administered at regularly scheduled times of year, generally each 8 - 12 weeks. Evidence based application of dewormers offers certain advantages over interval deworming in that it differentiates horses that are shedders of parasite ova from ones that are not by performing routine scheduled fecal exams. This allows directed targeting of higher risk individuals with appropriate anthelmintics to decrease overall drug usage and decrease the potential for parasite resistance.

Unfortunately this practice has led to some parasite infestation cases mostly because of lack of compliance in regular testing and some misunderstandings about the life cycles of equine parasites here in the Willamette Valley. It is documented that some strongyle species (especially small strongyles) undergo an encysted or hypobiotic state when climatic conditions are too severe for egg (ova) survival in the pasture environment. Consequently when conditions are dry and hot (as in 'Indian summer' in mid-October), egg counts in fecal tests will invariably be quite low misleading owners to assume their horse is not parasitized. However if the same animal is tested soon after the first fall rain, oftentimes fecal egg counts will rise dramatically.

Our practice attended just such a case in November when a 19 yr. old mare contracted a severe respiratory infection leading to a fatal pleuropneumonia. She had been fecal tested in October at another facility and had a zero egg count. In fact, the horse had never been dewormed. Subsequent fecal testing during her pneumonia yielded a count of 475 eggs per gram. This parasite infestation caused an even greater stress on her compromised immune.
(See photomicrograph below)

So some things to keep in mind if you choose a strategic parasite control program for your horse(s):

1) When implementing a strategic based deworming program, always consider the time of year and weather conditions when submitting samples. Do not test during hot dry conditions or extremely frigid conditions (as we had earlier last month) that will invariably lead to false low or negative counts.

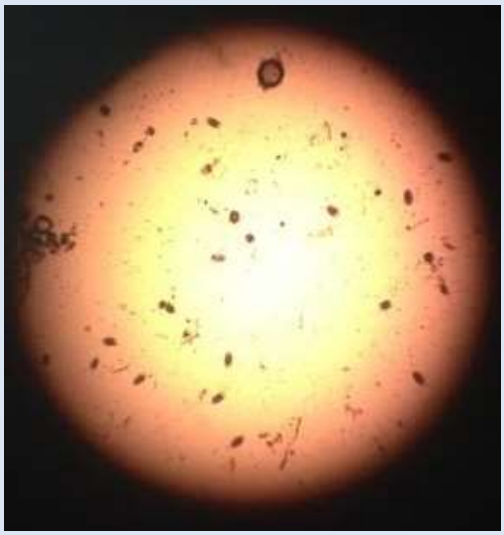
2) Test at least twice per year, preferably late fall (after the rains start) and early spring before new pasture. These are the most favorable times for parasite egg production. Stay diligent in fecal testing if you elect a strategic control program. Otherwise a more traditional interval program may better fit your horse's needs.

3) Recognize that not all worms are easily detectable on fecal exams, most notably tapeworms, pinworms, and bots. Stabled horses become infested with tapeworms by ingesting grain mites that serve as an intermediate host. Stomach bots are carried to your horse by bot flies. So even horses with continual negative fecals warrant deworming with an ivermectin or moxidectin/praziquantel product twice per year to remain protected.

4) Consider the individual differences in horses' immune systems when choosing deworming intervals.

Older horses or those with Cushing's disease may be immunocompromised and need more testing and/or treatment to protect them. Likewise young foals are particularly vulnerable to parasites. Ascarids (roundworms) are rare in adult horses but can grow to 6 inches long within 2 months in a foal. Much more frequent deworming, either continual feed-through or 4-6 week applications are indicated.

5) Always take into account the pasture conditions where your horse is grazing. At public stables with sometimes overgrazed and crowded pastures the parasite egg exposure is going to be much greater. This warrants more testing and/or deworming to protect your horse.



Photomicrograph of a horse fecal with 475 stronglye eggs per gram. The same horse had a zero count one month prior.

Start the New Year right by committing to a well-planned parasite control program. Take advantage of our 10% discount on fecal assays at $19.80 (includes eggs per gram count) and discounts on dispensed dewormers.

Other news:

The late fall pigeon fever outbreak appears to be halted after the extreme cold in December. Hopefully we will be rewarded with a diminished fly season this year.
We are planning a geriatric horse care seminar for February. Check our website or Facebook page for future listings.

Have a great 2014!

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