**Management of Tapeworm in Horses**

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A Tapeworm burden in the horse can cause a number of health-related problems, ranging from loss of condition to diarrhoea and colic. An infected horse has been shown to be 26 times more likely to develop ileal impaction colic than a non-infected horse, and eight times more likely to experience spasmodic colic, (Proudman, 2003). Tapeworms are white, flattened, segmented worms which can grow up to 20cm in length. They are usually found at the junction of the small and large intestine in the horse and use suckers to attach themselves to the gut wall.

Anthelmintics or wormers contain different active ingredients. Traditional Tapeworm control involves worming in Spring and Autumn using a wormer containing praziquantel or a double dose of a wormer containing pyrantel. It is important to note that not all wormers contain these active ingredients. Resistance to certain types of wormers has become an increasing problem in horses, where one or more of the chemical groups used in equine wormers are no longer effective against some worm species. Research has found that using too low a dose of wormer, too frequent worming and unnecessary worming may speed up the development of resistance in worms, (Lloyd et al, 2000). A targeted worming approach, in which wormers are only used when the presence of worms is confirmed, may help to prevent overuse of the active ingredients.

**Faecal Worm Egg Counts**

Faecal Worm Egg Counts (FWEC) are used to identify horses with high red and round worm burdens. Horses with a FWEC of more than 200epg (eggs per gram of faeces) should be treated with an appropriate wormer. Those with lower FWECs do not require treatment, preventing the unnecessary and ineffective use of wormers and also saving money. However, Tapeworms cannot be detected by routine faecal egg counts.

**Saliva Test**

A new test has now been developed to test for Tapeworm in horses by measuring antibodies in saliva which are specific to Tapeworm, using a combination of laboratory tests (called ELISAs). If a horse has a borderline or moderate/high burden, then it is recommended that the horse is treated for Tapeworm. Data from Equisal, the company which carries out the test, has showed that approximately 12% of horses tested for Tapeworm have a burden that needs treatment. This finding suggests that a large number of horses (approximately 88%) are receiving routine Tapeworm treatment when they do not need it.

The test involves collecting saliva from the horse’s mouth using a saliva swab and sending the sample to the testing company who will analyse the sample and report back on the findings with a recommendation whether treatment for Tapeworm is required.

**Saliva Test Results from CAFRE**

In November 2014, 14 horses at CAFRE, Enniskillen campus, were tested for Tapeworm using the saliva test and all horses came back negative, meaning they had little or no Tapeworm burden and therefore no Tapeworm treatment was required. In December 2015 the same 14 horses were tested and one horse came back with a very low/borderline result and treatment was recommended and given. The other 13 horses had a negative result and therefore did not receive treatment against Tapeworm.

In the past two years CAFRE, Enniskillen campus has only had to worm one horse in this group of 14 against Tapeworm. The test provides potential cost savings to horse owners as horses who test negative do not need to be wormed for Tapeworm twice a year, in the traditional way. It is also prevents the overuse of wormers which can lead to resistance in worms.

For further information on worming your horse, contact your Private Veterinary Practitioner or local AMTRA Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) in your local tack shop or feed store. SQP’s are professionally qualified people who are entitled to supply certain veterinary medicines, including equine wormers in the UK under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations.

References

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