



Sharing targeted worming practice at The Mare and Foal Sanctuary

At The Mare and Foal Sanctuary, we started a new targeted worming procedure in early 2021 and now have two years of practice-based evidence to share.

We are a regional equine welfare charity working in the South West of England with over 600 rescued horses and ponies in our care at our five sanctuaries in Devon and through our successful rehoming scheme.

Our targeted worming practice involves carrying out faecal worm egg counts four times a year with our sanctuary herds. In line with good practice to minimise anthelmintic resistance, we're only worming equines as needed.

Our practice is to worm a horse if their egg count reaches 350 eggs per gram of faeces or more. This is a change from our previous threshold of 250 eggs per gram. We made this change on veterinary advice. The higher threshold is still an acceptable level and means we can worm fewer horses and reduce unnecessary use of anthelmintics.

If a horse has a worm egg count of 600 eggs per gram or more, they are wormed immediately and a repeat worm egg count is carried out two weeks later. We want to see a reduction in the eggs per gram. If there is still a high reading of over 350 eggs per gram after two weeks, we believe it is due to anthelmintic resistance.

Over the past 12 months, we've had to worm fewer horses because worm egg counts are being undertaken more regularly.

On veterinary advice we now adjust the dose when worming. Any horse over 12hh will be dosed at their weight plus 50kg and any pony under 12hh will be dosed at their weight plus 25kg. This accounts for some loss of wormer during administration and ensures a full dose is received. Adjusting the dose means worms that have been exposed to the drug are now unlikely to be left alive. Leaving any worms alive contributes to resistance.

We have also seen variation in worm egg counts between our different sites. For example, our equines at our site for horses with complex health conditions don't often need worming. This is probably because they are an older, more stable population. Ponies at our moorland facility, on the other hand, need more worming due to the higher population in a small area.

Worm egg count results

	2021	2022
Worm egg counts performed	689	649
Wormer treatments given	214 (31%)	114 (18%)
High worm egg count (600+ eggs per gram)	105 (49%)	42 (37%)
Repeat wormed due to high worm egg count	2 (2%)	4 (10%)

Equines at our rehoming yard in North Devon also need a lot of worming because the wet land means fields cannot be poo picked as thoroughly as other yards. The ground very rarely dries out enough to interrupt the lifecycle of the worms. There is a higher percentage of young equines at this site. This group are at higher risk for worms especially when grazed together.

Our rehabilitation yard reports a lot of high worm egg counts in unhandled horses and those not yet at a stage in training which allows direct administration of wormers. This is likely to be because the wormer is administered in feed and there may be issues with incomplete ingestion of the wormer. This could mean the horses are under-wormed which may contribute to resistance.

When analysing the 2023 data, we will compare age of horses requiring worming as well as age and type of their herdmates. We will also look at which medical conditions they have as some may be immune suppressed. This analysis will further inform how wormer resistance manifests in our herds.

For more information about our targeted worming practice, please contact us at equine@mareandfoal.org

As an equine welfare charity, we are part of the wider stakeholder group Controlling ANTiparasitic Resistance in Equines Responsibly (CANTER) which is coordinated by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

For more information contact:
anthelmintic.resistance@vmd.gov.uk

For more welfare advice please visit
www.mareandfoal.org/horse-advice

www.mareandfoal.org

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