

## Types of Worms commonly found in Horses

There are many species of worms that affect horses, but the most important ones are listed below.

### Large Red Worms (Strongyles)



These are the type of worm which in the past owners and vets were most concerned about. The life cycle of these species involves migration of larvae from the bowel into the abdomen, before returning back to the bowel as adult worms. These worms may be associated with general signs of malaise; but one species, *Strongylus vulgaris*, migrates specifically to the arteries supplying the bowel and can cause obstruction to the blood flow, resulting in a serious form of colic sometimes necessitating surgery. Modern worming regimes are usually very effective at killing these species and so recently their significance has diminished.

### Small Red Worms (Cyathostomes)



As the significance of large red worms has declined over the past twenty years or so, the problems associated with this group of worms seem to have dramatically escalated. This is due in part to their relatively short life cycle, but is also a consequence of the ability of these worms to develop resistance to modern wormers. This problem of resistance is compounded by the tendency of these worms to "hibernate" in the lining of the bowel. When a horse swallows *Cyathostomes* larvae from the pasture, the larvae develop within the lining of the bowel and then re-emerge as adults. However a proportion remains within the lining and may remain there for years. Whilst hibernating these inhibited larvae are resistant to many types of wormer. The larvae then re-emerge, often at the end of winter and this re-emergence may involve large numbers at the same time, resulting in enormous damage to the bowel wall, which may even prove to be fatal.

## Tapeworms (Cestodes)



These worms are less likely to cause problems compared to the red worms, however they are a potential cause of colic. Tapeworm eggs are not usually detected in dung samples, but a blood test is available.

## Lung Worm (*Dictyocaulus arnfieldi*)



Donkeys are the natural host for these worms, and don't usually show any symptoms. However horses grazing in the same field, or in a field previously grazed by donkeys, may also be affected. The worm does not usually complete its life cycle in the horse and so is not often detectable by faecal worm counts. Horses affected with significant numbers of this worm cough due to the presence of the larvae within the lungs.

## Roundworms (Ascarids)



Usually affect young horses only, typically foals and yearlings. Despite this worm being an intestinal parasite, infestation often results in coughing. This is due to the larvae migrating through the lung on their way to the intestine.

### **Pinworm (Oxyuris)**



The primary presenting complaint in horses with pinworm infections is tail itching or rubbing “Seat Itch”. The itching is caused by the eggs being deposited around the anus.

### **Bots (Gastrophilus)**



In truth these aren't really anything to do with worms, but are often put into the same category by owners. Bots are the larval stage of a certain species of fly. This fly lays its eggs on the horse's coat, often around the forelegs and neck, which the horse then swallows when it grooms itself. The eggs then develop and the larvae remain in the stomach, until they are passed in the dung as pupae. Finding these pupae in the dung may be distasteful, however it is very rare for bots to cause any medical problems.