



EQUINE TAPEWORM

Anoplocephala perfoliata

TAPEWORM IN HORSES

There are three species known to affect horses; **Anoplocephala perfoliata** (the most common), **Anoplocephala magna** and **Anoplocephaloides mamillana**.

Tapeworm live in the ileocaecal junction (between the small intestine and large intestine where the caecum is connected) and small intestine. They sucker onto the horse's gut wall and live off food that the horse ingests.

Symptoms

Saliva testing of horses in the UK has shown that around 27% are infected with tapeworm parasites. This is fewer than we once thought but we still need to be vigilant as their presence can result in physical damage to the gut tissue and cause serious problems such as diarrhoea, weight loss and colic.

Only 27% of horses need tapeworm treatment

Testing with EquiSal

The innovative EquiSal test is a simple to use saliva test that detects harmful tapeworm infections in horses. It works by scientifically measuring antibody levels to the tapeworm parasites that the horse produces. This accurately detects levels to give a result of low, borderline or moderate/high and indicates whether treatment is required.

The test was developed by Austin Davis Biologics and is available direct from Westgate Labs. Unlike the ELISA blood

test, owners can take samples themselves without the need for a vet using a specially designed saliva collection swab that is inserted into the horse's mouth.

By combining the test with regular worm counts we can now target treatment to all three parasite groups that are the major threat to horse health. Horses should be tested for tapeworm every 6 months, at least 4 months after the last tapewormer has been given.

Resistance: The test can also be used to ensure any treatment has been effective and monitor potential wormer resistance. Take an EquiSal swab two months after worming for tapeworm to check drug efficacy.

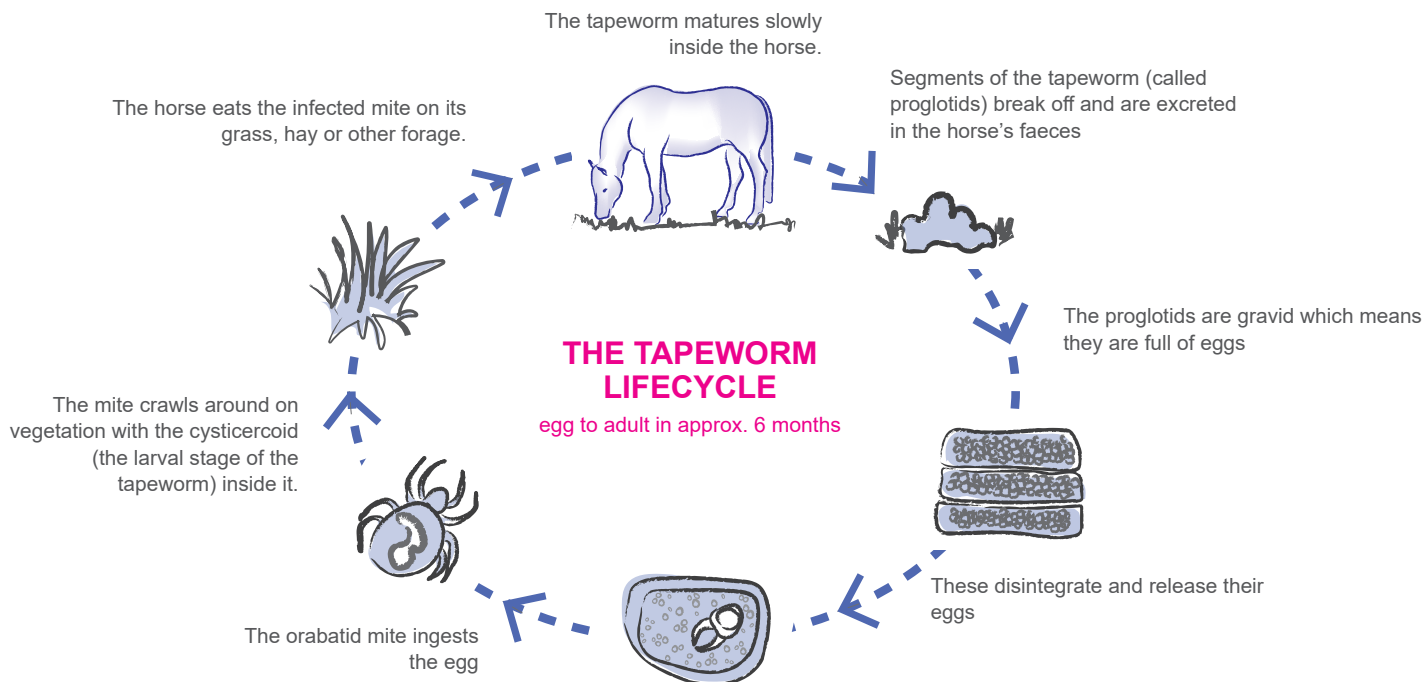
Worm egg counts

Tapeworm eggs are often seen under the microscope in a worm egg count but the test is not definitive because the eggs are laid in packets rather than being evenly distributed through the dung like redworm and roundworm. Nevertheless they will always be reported if seen.

Below left to right; Place the cotton swab into the interdental space; the indicator turns pink when enough saliva has been collected; put the swab sample tool into the tube of preservative solution; flat white segments of the tapeworm can occasionally be seen in the dung.

Horses must not have eaten, drunk or been exercised for 30mins prior to sampling...





Treatment

Two chemicals are licensed to treat tapeworm in horses: praziquantel and a double dose of pyrantel (eg. Strongid P). Praziquantel is preferred if only tapeworm is being targeted as pyrantel also treats redworm, ascarid and pinworm and exposure that isn't required still contributes to the build up of resistance.

However praziquantel is more difficult to get hold of as a single chemical wormer now that the branded product available over the counter has been withdrawn from sale. (It is still available in combination with ivermectin eg. Equimax, Eqvalan Duo etc. and with moxidectin eg. Equest Pramox). As a single chemical it needs to be obtained from your vet, prescribed as a veterinary special.

Worming is only required if results indicate that infection is present. Evidence based treatment saves unnecessary chemicals, slowing the build up of resistance to these important drugs as well as being better for horse health and the environment.

Tapeworm treatment was traditionally done in spring and autumn, at the start and end of hunting season. This can prove a useful aide memoir but as long as the gap is six months apart it does not matter when in the year you choose to test.

It can make sense to combine your winter dose for encysted redworm and tapeworm treatment using Equest Pramox between December and February. Alternate the use of praziquantel with double dose pyrantel to slow resistance. Pyrantel will also have some effect on adult stages of redworm.

In rare cases horses with high tapeworm burdens can develop a syndrome known as post-dosing colic. Veterinary advice should be sought to tackle this burden.

	Green	Yellow	Red
EquiSal Tapeworm Saliva Score	< -0.09	-0.09 to 0.6	> 0.6
Tapeworm diagnosis	Low	Borderline	Moderate/High
Tapeworm treatment recommended	No	Yes	Yes

Above: EquiSal Tapeworm saliva score results

How are horses infected with tapeworms?

Horse tapeworms rely on an intermediate host to spread the infection. The oribatid mite is a tiny creature which lives on grassland and in forage. The horse picks up the tapeworm eggs from his pasture whilst grazing or from hay and straw. The tapeworms are relatively slow growing and take months to reach maturity in the horse's gut.

Mites are thought to be more common on permanent pastures and acidic soils and less likely on chalky downland or short-term grass leys.



Anti-clockwise; Forage can be a potential source of infection; an oribatid mite, the intermediate host of the tapeworm; a tapeworm egg



Worming Questions? Please contact our friendly team of SQPs for free veterinary approved advice.