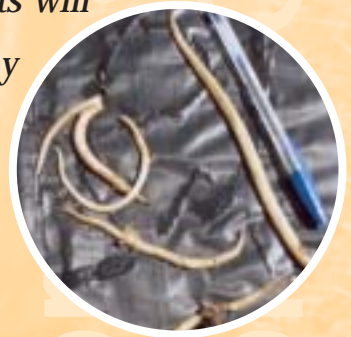


Worms and Worm Control



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The Charity's purpose is to provide and promote the welfare, care and protection of horses, ponies, donkeys and mules.

Redwings Welfare

Worms and Worm Control

Parasitic worms are small, but can be deadly. They live inside the body of a 'host' equine and survive by taking nutrients directly from the animal's tissues and blood. This causes damage to the equine in two ways.

Firstly, by having to share its' food intake with worms, an equine will not benefit from everything it eats. As the worms reproduce and their population grows with each completed life cycle, more and more nutrition will be used to sustain the worms instead of the equine. This means that even an animal eating plenty of food will start to lose weight, lack energy and look generally unhealthy.

The worms also cause damage through their physical presence in the body. They may cause ulcers where they attach themselves to the inside of the body. They can also create blockages in any arteries, tubes or internal organs where they collect in larger numbers. A large number of colic cases in equines are known to be caused by the presence of worms within the digestive system.

Worms can reproduce at an alarming rate. To control them, their life cycle needs to be interrupted in two places. Firstly, live worms within the body must be killed off by using de-worming drug products. Secondly, dung must be removed from areas where equines graze as these contain worm eggs

which will otherwise hatch into larvae and re-enter the animal as it picks up grass. To undertake either of these two essential tasks without the other is not effective.



Above. Onia, who is pictured on the front cover, was found suffering from a heavy worm burden. She has gone on to make a full recovery under Redwings care.

De-worming Drugs

Control of parasitic worms is made more difficult because there are several different kinds which thrive within horses, ponies and donkeys. Their life cycles are different, they tend to live in different parts of the body and different drugs are needed to tackle the various types. The most common worms which cause serious damage to equines in the UK are small and large redworms, tapeworms and roundworms.

Small redworms are a particular problem as during their development from larvae to adult worm they form a 'cocoon', within which they embed themselves into the wall

Worms and Worm Control



Left. Roundworms can be quite large. The pen has been put in the tray to give a sense of scale.

Above. This pony had such a bad infestation of large redworm that adult worms were being passed in his dung, which would not usually be the case.

of an equine's intestines. This cocoon protects them from many de-worming drugs and doses of a special drug are needed to kill larvae in this phase. If uncontrolled, the effect of these parasites can be devastating, as when they break out of their cocoons the eruption may seriously damage the lining of the intestines. In large numbers this can cause overwhelming diarrhoea, severe weight loss and probable death within a few days.

Tapeworms are from a different worm family which means they require specific active ingredients to tackle them. They are particularly associated with certain types of serious colic, which means they are also potentially life threatening.

A de-worming drug program will therefore need to use a number of products to control the various worms which may infest an equine. De-worming drugs are expensive and contain strong active ingredients, so it is important that a product is only used at the correct dose at the correct time. A veterinary surgery, de-worming drug company or equine nutritionist will be able to give advice on putting together a program which should control worms in the most effective, healthy and economic way. Cheaper products are not always the most cost effective as they may need to be given in higher doses or the worms may have developed a resistance to a particular active ingredient.



Clearing dung from pasture should be a natural part of any equine management routine

Dung Removal

This is a much more straightforward process, but one that is too often neglected. To be effective, all droppings must be removed from pasture at least twice a week. This not only reduces the chances of worm larvae entering the equine as it grazes, but also greatly improves the quality of pasture. Worms cannot survive for more than 5 months away from a host, so resting pasture for this length of time will also make a big difference to worm control as well as providing a new crop of fresh grazing.

Worm Egg Counts

The number of adult female worms within the body of a horse, pony or donkey will affect the number of worm eggs present in the equine's dung; more adults meaning more eggs. A veterinary practice will be able to carry out a worm egg count from a fresh dung sample, which will indicate whether an animal has a large number of worms in its system and if any one type of worm is of particular concern.

A worm egg count only costs a few pounds and can save money as it may indicate that the next dose of de-wormer is not actually needed. Worm eggs will be measured in eggs per gram (epg) of dung. Ideally, the egg count should be under 200 epg, and definitely under 500 epg. Any egg count above this number would indicate a large worm burden which needs addressing as a matter of urgency. Worm egg counts of over 5,000 epg have been discovered in some welfare cases. Some of the animals concerned could not be saved.



Above top. *This emaciated pony had a huge infestation of both roundworms and small redworms. Although only a yearling, sadly he had to be put to sleep.*

Above. *The post mortem revealed a huge infestation of worms throughout his system.*

Redwings Welfare Contacts

Shared Facilities

Livery yards, riding schools or any set up where different equines share pasture should adopt a joint worming program. If one horse is administered with a de-worming drug but then picks up larvae from a field shared with another horse which has not had de-worming treatment, the worms will not have been controlled in either animal. It is important that all equines receive the same drugs at the same time and all pasture is vigilantly cleared of droppings if the battle against worms is to be effective.

Horses and Donkeys

It has been traditional to avoid keeping donkeys with horses or ponies because of a particular parasite called lungworm. Donkeys can carry lungworms in their system without ill effect, but if these are passed on, horses and ponies can become very ill. However, since the development of de-worming drugs with the active ingredient 'ivermectin', lungworm can be easily controlled within any good de-worming program.

Please Remember

It is vital to de-worm young, sick and emaciated equines but these animals are vulnerable and should only be treated under the guidance of a veterinary surgeon.

Always read the manufacturers instructions in full before administering any de-worming product.

The following are useful sources of further information:

Diagnosteq

(Worm research project at the Veterinary Hospital at Liverpool University)

Equine Division
Leahurst
Neston
Wirral CH64 7TE

www.diagnosteq.co.uk

The website contains a useful example of a standard worming program and the links page has a range of further contacts, including some of the major de-worming drug companies.

'All About Worms' by Sonia Davidson
Allen Photographic Guide No. 16
Also contains a useful example of a standard worming program.

British Equine Veterinary Association

Wakefield House
46 High Street
Sawston
Cambridge CB2 4BG
01223 836970
www.beva.org.uk

Redwings Horse Sanctuary

Hapton
Norwich
NR15 1SP
Horse Care and Welfare 01508 481008
General Enquiries 01508 481000
www.redwings.co.uk

Redwings Welfare Information

Redwings' Welfare Team is proactive in the promotion of equine care and welfare, believing that access to accurate and up-to-date information is vital if owners and carers are to meet the needs of their animal.

Redwings' welfare leaflets are designed to provide an overview of many important issues which are encountered regularly in welfare cases with which the Sanctuary is involved. The series includes information on the following topics:

- **Laminitis**
- **Hoof Care and Farriery**
- **Worms and De-worming**
- **Food, Digestion and Energy**
- **Veteran Horses and Retirement**
- **Horse Psychology**
- **Donkeys**
- **Equine Welfare and the Law**

To request copies of leaflets or to speak to one of the team about any equine welfare issues, please feel free to contact the department by post, phone or email.

The Welfare Team

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Email: info@redwings.co.uk



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