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Common Dewormers: Still Effective Against Small Strongyles?

We know that anthelmintic (or dewormer) resistance in equine internal parasites—meaning the drugs we use are becoming ineffective against the parasites they're designed to control—is changing the way researchers and veterinarians recommend that we deworm our horses. "But what are the odds that I'll have this problem on my little farm," you wonder. According to recent study results, the odds are pretty good. They suggest that some commercially available dewormers—fenbendazole, oxibendazole, and pyrantel pamoate—showed poor efficacy on the majority of farms sampled during the project.

In the study, nearly 1,000 horses from 67 farms in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States received one of four different deworming products. At the same time a fecal sample was collected for analysis for parasite eggs. The horses with strongyle fecal egg counts totaling over 200 eggs per gram were retreated with fenbendazole, oxibendazole, or pyrantel pamoate. Of those horses, only 6%, 21% and 43%, respectively, showed fecal egg count reductions greater than 90%.

"On the majority of farms sampled, these three products performed poorly," said study author Meagan A. Smith, DVM, Dipl. ABVP, staff veterinarian for the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine's Field Service.

Currently, ivermectin and moxidectin—two macrocyclic lactone medications—still offer good control against small strongyles. "Their continued efficacy is significant because so far they are the only available dewormers for horses that still have consistently good activity against strongyles," she said.

To reduce the development of additional resistance in intestinal parasites, horse owners need to embrace a different approach to deworming, she said. Researchers agree that selective therapy is a more sustainable approach to parasite control. Rather than administering rotational or daily deworming doses, selective therapy focuses on less frequent dosing based on fecal egg count results.

Fortunately, implementing selective therapy on your farm is easy:

- Ask your veterinarian to perform fecal egg counts to identify high shedders.
- Use the fecal egg count reduction tests to determine which dewormers are effective against small strongyles on your farm. Use only those products that show a 90% or greater reduction in fecal strongyle egg counts 10 to 14 days after the horse is dewormed.
- Deworm high shedders at least four times per year. Deworm all other horses twice per year, typically in the spring and again in the fall.

"Selective therapy will also lead to a dramatic reduction in unnecessary medicating of horses, as well as decreasing the money spent on dewormers annually," Smith added.

The study, "Efficacy of major anthelmintics for reduction of fecal shedding of strongyle-type eggs in horses in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States," was published in *Veterinary Parasitology*.