

# Ask A Vet: Puzzled About Parasites

*Sunday, March 29, 2015*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I've always dewormed my horses every eight weeks and they've never had parasite problems. My friend says she does fecal tests and deworms accordingly. So I spoke to another friend and she says she's using a natural dewormer every day. I've never heard of this and wasn't sure which was the better way to deworm?

Dear Reader,

Prior to the development of anthelmintics (dewormers) parasites were a major cause of colic among horses. When these drugs first became available, it was recommended to use them every eight weeks to eliminate parasites completely. Unfortunately, over time, parasites have begun to develop resistance to these drugs so people are trying to find new solutions.

Luckily, there are very few instances in which worms are resistant to all dewormers (although it does happen.) Therefore, a great way to deworm is to check fecal egg counts. Most horses will normally have a minimal worm burden. This is not life threatening and does not necessarily require treatment! While it's different than what we've done in the past, allowing some horses to maintain a small population of minimally exposed parasites contributes genetically susceptible worms to the environment. This helps prevent resistance. Fecal egg counts also identify those horses with higher worm burdens which do need addressed. Performing serial egg counts on the same horses also determines if the drug being used is appropriate or if resistance has developed. This is much more involved than simply worming every horse every eight weeks, but is much better for them over time. This strategy prevents the problem of having a horse becoming sick from highly resistant and difficult to treat worms.

Other products are out there with claims to be natural remedies for worms. Unfortunately, without performing egg counts on the same individual horse both prior to and after treatment, there's no way to verify they work. Many have actually been proven not to. Fecal exams and/or egg counts are now the best way to determine a deworming protocol for your individual horses and your herd.

-Dr. Kathryn Ernst