



Statistics have shown that colic is, by far, the number one cause of death in horses all over the world. Some experts estimate that as high as 95% of all colics are due either directly or indirectly to parasite damage.

COLIC

Causes & Prevention

By Dr. Jack Leonard

A variety of internal parasites are known to affect horses. However, the most devastating effects are those caused by the strongyle species of parasites. The immature (larval) forms of strongyles damage the arterial and nerve supply of various segments of the intestinal tract. This causes them to malfunction and this can produce various abnormalities such as impactions, twists, intussusceptions, etc., etc. These problems collectively form the clinical syndrome we call colic.

There are many treatments and philosophies concerning colic. However, all would agree that the best philosophy on colic is preventative medicine. The cornerstone of any colic prevention program should be regular, scheduled de-worming. De-wormers are also called anthelmintics. There are many good ones available to us today. Most are safe, effective and have little or no side effects. Most are also safe for use in pregnant mares.



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Although there is some theoretical debate, from a practical point of view, the best de-worming program should involve rotation of anthelmintics. Rotation involves using different de-wormers (different chemicals, not different trade names of the same chemical) at scheduled intervals at different times of the year. It is not a good idea to use the same de-wormer over and over again, on the same animals. Parasites have been shown to develop resistance to anthelmintics just like bacteria have developed resistance to antibiotics.

Foals should be de-wormed starting by two months of age, earlier is there is a problem. They should be de-wormed at least every 6 weeks, up until about 3 years of age. It appears that most of the significant parasite damage is done to an animal when it is young. Older horses should be de-wormed about every 2 months. There is no single schedule that will meet every need, so that the rotations can be varied according to individual needs.

Besides de-worming, there are many other aspects to colic prevention. Good, clean food, provided on a regular schedule, as well as a constant supply of clean water are essential.

Dehydration is a major factor in the pathogenesis of colic. The ration should not be too high in concentrate (grain) and should have sufficient fiber content to maintain good intestinal motility.

Manure should be removed daily, along with soiled bedding. Paddocks should also have manure removed on a regular basis. It is also a good idea to rake or turn over the soil in paddocks from time to time, in order to expose parasite larvae to the lethal rays of the sun.

“Another common colic problem here in Egypt is sand.”

Obviously one should avoid horses feeding off the sand, but sometimes this is difficult, if not impossible. It is a good idea to use some type of sand removal product, such as Sand Blast, several times per year, depending upon the situation.

Equine colic can be devastating. It produces tremendous emotional and financial losses in our industry every year.

There is no question that any time, effort and money spent on its prevention is a worthwhile investment.

