Parasite Control for Foals and Young Horses
Updated Guidance

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Parasite infection and with it, wormer resistance, is well documented as one of the biggest threats to horse health. Young horses are exceptionally vulnerable to dying from parasite related disease or suffering lifelong consequences as a result. No more so is this the case than with foals and young horses, and especially where multiple horses under five are kept together.

Advice is ever evolving as we seek a balance between the long game of trying to slow wormer resistance and the health and wellbeing of the herd or individual. With this in mind, the CANTER **Guidelines for Sustainable Parasite Control in Equines** was updated May 2026, to include a new chapter dedicated to parasite control in young horses under five.

Parasite control is a hands-on challenge where proactive management can make a significant difference. There are many tests at our disposal to identify parasite types and infection/excretion levels. A strategic programme of these is recommended to inform the need to treat and, when needed, the type of wormer that needs to be used. We shouldn't be frightened of treating those that need it. The new chapter lays out protocols from foal to five years. It's time to up our vigilance for both broodmares and their offspring!

Here are our top tips for managing parasite infection in youngsters:

- Parasite control of young horses is complex and infection pressure can vary widely depending on management, stocking density and the time of year foals are born. Seek the help of a qualified prescriber (vet, SQP or pharmacist) to put a plan in place.
- Start early, don't wait! The lifecycle of parasites can be short. Foals are recommended their first worming treatments from 8 weeks old. Going forward they need an age specific approach combining treatments and testing dependent on their environment, risk assessment and the time of year.
- Monitor weight and growth regularly. Under dosing makes treatments less effective and speeds up wormer resistance. Parasite infection could be a contributing factor in youngsters that aren't thriving. Test before treating and consult your vet if signs of disease are present.
- Carry out regular worm egg counts for small redworm and ascarid infections, followed by reduction tests to determine the wormer choice and monitor whether these have been effective.

- In addition to blood or saliva ('EquiSal') antibody tests to detect the presence of infection, faecal flotation tapeworm tests for young horses can be undertaken using the 'Proudman' method to help assess wormer effectiveness for these parasites.
- Proactive treatments for foals under six months old and seasonal treatments for the possibility of encysted small redworm are recommended for most horses under five.
- Although the prevalence of large redworm (*Strongylus. vulgaris)* is currently low in the UK, youngstock may be particularly at risk due to their higher susceptibility. Monitoring for these parasites by larval culturing should be considered.
- Management really counts, to break the lifecycle of worms on the pasture and prevent infection. Avoid re-using the same paddock year on year for new foals. Poo pick at least once a week, rest fields for extended periods (6 months plus) and cross-graze with sheep or cattle to lower infection potential on the pasture.

Read the full Youngstock chapter of the CANTER Guidelines at: canterforhorses.org.uk/guidelines/

For support to put a test-led plan in place for your youngstock please get in touch.

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Further horse owner friendly info on all aspects of equine parasite control can be found at: https://www.westgatelabs.co.uk/info-zone/