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News and Information from UT-TSU Extension Wilson County

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Importance of Controlling Internal Parasites in Equine

There are more than 150 types of internal parasites known to infect equine. From a practical standpoint, the most important ones are strongyles, ascarids, tapeworms and bots. The digestive tract, or stomach and intestines, is the most commonly affected area, although larvae migrate through all tissues of the horse's body.

Every horse is infected by one or more of these parasites. For this reason, horses should be on a parasite prevention and control program. A general knowledge and understanding of the nature of these parasites and their development is important to horse owner in understanding necessary prevention and control measures.

Internal parasites are very widespread. Unless control measures are practiced, they are likely to increase and can cause severe injury or death of the horse. Issues include retarded growth, digestive upset, rough hair coat, pot-bellied, colic, pneumonia, anemia and even death. An overload of parasites can lower the animal's immune system and reduce it's ability to fight disease.

Strongyles are the most injurious, whereas ascarids, bots and tapeworms are generally less harmful. A few parasites may be tolerated by the horse without apparent signs of ill effect, but larger numbers are quite likely to be harmful.

Horses affected the most by parasites are young sucklings or weanlings and yearlings. This is because in most cases, resistance or immunity is built up by the time a horse is 2 or 3 years old. Strongyles and bots affect horses of all ages.

Sanitation and management practices should be used to assist in controlling internal parasite infections. Foals are born free of internal parasites. The buildup of their internal parasite infections is related to the degree of contact, either direct or indirect, with older animals carrying the infections. Manure is the main means of spreading the infections by contamination of feed and water supplies or the environment.

Also, sanitation and management practices can aid in controlling the spread of parasites transfers. These practices assist the natural destructive forces such as sunlight and drying during transfer stages.

Remember that good basic management practices can lessen internal parasites and include:

- Don't feed on the ground
- Pile manure before spreading.
- Deworm periodically.
- Control flies.
- Clip pastures

It may be necessary to treat the animals with specific drugs, commonly referred to as anthelmintics, to obtain effective control. Contact your veterinarian for recommended treatments. The veterinarian's services can include a microscopic examination of fecal samples for an indication of the kinds and relative

numbers of parasites in the animals. Your veterinarian is a very important part of your health management team.

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