

Tapeworms

Anoplocephala spp.

Tapeworms are cestodes – a group of segmented flatworms. They are now rather rare, due to the frequent use of praziquantel, an anthelmintic that kills cestodes.

Lifecycle: Adult tapeworms reside in the small intestine. Rather than laying eggs, adults will drop segments that contain many eggs. These segments disintegrate and eggs are passed in the manure. Unlike most other parasites, tapeworms require an intermediate host: forage mites. These mites are free living in the pasture. The mites will ingest the tapeworm eggs, where the eggs hatch and develop into an intermediate stage which takes 2 to 4 months. Horses will then ingest mites along with pasture, and the intermediate tapeworms will then fully develop into adults in the horse, taking another 2 to 4 months to do so. The entire lifecycle of the tapeworm is between 4 and 8 months.

Clinical signs: Tapeworms are generally considered unpathogenic, however large burdens may produce the generic symptoms of unthriftiness and enteritis. Significant burdens may lead to colic or even perforation of the intestine, which is fatal.

Diagnosis: Tapeworm eggs are easily identifiable on faecal egg counts. However, there are reports of tapeworms not being consistent egg layers, as such low burdens may be missed via a single FEC.

Control and management: Management on pasture is difficult, due to pasture mites act as a reservoir in their role as an intermediate host. A yearly treatment with a dewormer that contains praziquantel is usually enough to control infection.

