

Pinworms

Oxyuris equi

Pinworms are relatively common parasites, and can often be seen passed in the manure. Adult females reach between 10-15cm in length, while males are far smaller at only 1.2cm long. While the presence of pinworms may appear dramatic, they are relatively unpathogenic with the major issue being the tail rubbing that accompanies infection.

Lifecycle: Adult worms reside in the large intestine. When females are ready to lay eggs, they migrate to the anus, where eggs are laid in clumps on the skin outside the anus. These eggs then fall and contaminate the environment before being ingested again by horses. Following ingestion of larvae, they migrate to the large intestine before development through larval stages into the adult stage, a process that takes around 5 months. Adult worms can live for 6 months.

Clinical signs: Clinical signs are rarely observed in horses that are infected with pinworm. Extreme burdens may lead to an inflammatory response in the intestine. The main symptom of pinworm infection is the tail rubbing due to the itching caused by the egg laying worms.

Diagnosis: Pinworm infection can usually be identified by the horse owner, via the presence of the eggs laid around the anus of the horse (see pictures below). Eggs sometimes appear on a FEC, however as they are not laid in the manure, they can be missed on a FEC. Tail rubbing alone should not be considered proof of pinworm infection, as horses may rub their tails for many reasons (e.g. skin infections etc).

Control and management: Pinworms are susceptible to most dewormers. Unless burdens or tail rubbing behaviour are significant, treatment of infection can wait until treatment for strongyles is also necessary.



Two examples of pinworm perititis. This is the best diagnosis for pinworm infection.