

FAECAL EGG COUNTS – WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO TAKE SAMPLES

Faecal egg counts can be used for three main purposes:

1. Monitoring the level of strongyle egg shedding in the dung of horses
2. Testing the effectiveness of the wormers (anthelmintics) used
3. Checking for ascarid eggs (large roundworms) and other parasite eggs

Faecal egg counts do not provide any reliable information about the risk of disease or the involvement of parasites in cases of disease.

A high faecal egg count does not necessarily mean more worms – it only means more eggs being pushed out in the dung. Often parasites cause disease due to the larvae which don't produce eggs.

Faecal egg counts are useful to identify strongyles (redworms), ascarids (roundworms) and *Strongyloides westeri* (threadworms), but they are unreliable to identify tapeworms, pinworms, fluke and lungworm eggs.

GUIDANCE NOTES ON HOW TO TAKE SAMPLES FOR FAECAL EGG COUNTS

- Samples should be placed in bags or containers without air
- Keep samples as cool as possible (eg refrigerate) if stored more than a few hours
- Samples can be kept refrigerated (not frozen) for up to 5 days but should be processed as soon as possible
- Using a gloved hand, take 5 pinches from at least 3 dung balls from a fresh dung pile
- Make sure that the container is clearly labelled with your name / yard and horse name
- When samples are processed in the lab they will be well mixed to increase the accuracy
- The sample should be at least 5 grams (heaped teaspoon)
- Air must be excluded from the sample when transported
- Complete the worm egg count request form (this can be downloaded from the website) and send with the sample
- Samples should be posted (first class) or taken to the lab on the same day that they are collected
- Care must be taken in warm weather as higher temperatures rapidly affect egg counts