



Hunter LLS Pig Newsletter 5: Internal Parasites

August 2020

We often get asked if pet pigs need to be wormed and which product should be used. To determine if your pigs have worms, it is best to do a worm test. This will tell you which worms they have and how big a burden they have, which will then indicate which worm product will be most appropriate. Worm test kits can be collected from all the Hunter LLS Offices (ring first and one can be left out for you). The cost involved is less than \$90 for individual egg counts and worm typing on 10 samples. This is very cost effective, especially if it indicates that there are none or very few worms present, so you may not even need to worm your pigs at that time.

The most common worms that affect pigs include roundworms (*Ascaris suum*) and whipworm. Pigs 6 to 12 weeks old are the most seriously affected. Adult roundworms live in the pig's small intestine but immature phases travel through the liver and lungs. All lifecycle stages cause reduced pig growth rates and may cause coughing and diarrhoea. Female roundworms can produce more than 300,000 eggs per day. Adult worms can block the small intestine and bile duct causing loss of appetite, vomiting and death. Larvae (immature forms) reach the liver after hatching from eggs in the small intestine and passing through the gut wall. Liver damage is seen as white 'milk' spots on the surface of the liver. Entering the bloodstream, larvae reach the heart and then the lungs, where they may cause a low-grade pneumonia. After being coughed up and swallowed, they then mature in the small intestine.



Roundworm eggs as seen under the microscope and the worm itself – similar size as spaghetti!

Whipworms are smaller and live in the large intestines of the pig. Affected pigs usually become inappetent, and have diarrhoea, which may cause dehydration. There may be mucous or blood in the faeces and the pigs may become anaemic. Whipworm infection should always be considered when there is diarrhea with blood and mucus.

Pigs become infected with both roundworms and whipworms by eating eggs containing larvae, usually after contamination of food, soil or bedding with faeces. The eggs are thick-shelled and resistant to disinfectants. As the eggs are sticky they are easily spread on dirty farm boots or tyres. Roundworm eggs can remain infective in the environment for up to 10 years. However worm eggs need moisture and warmth to survive.

Successful control of worms in pig herds involves a combination of drenching with an appropriate product and environmental control. Good hygiene and nutrition are very important in controlling infections and reducing the adverse effects of the parasites. In outdoor areas, you

must try and avoid a large amount of worm eggs and larvae where the pigs are kept. It is best to strategically worm regularly and then move the pigs to a clean area. However, remember that some eggs, including roundworm eggs, can survive for years, so moving the pigs back to a heavily infested area, will then risk re-infection.

For pet pigs, routine collection and disposal of faeces (the same as you would do for a pet dog) is the best way to prevent re-infestation and worm build-up. Treating pigs with drenches when there is a heavy burden in the environment, will only provide a very temporary solution.

There are several different products registered for parasite control in pigs, including injectable and oral formulations, which may be given in feed or water. Make sure you always read the instructions thoroughly, weigh your pigs so that you can ensure the correct dose is given, and abide by the withholding periods listed, which may differ between brands.

For more information and for some recommendations on products available (see Appendix 2): https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/433018/Internal-parasites-of-pigs.pdf

I have also attached the links for two awesome short pig videos created by our colleagues at Murray LLS:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4C1Wz_lhSe0

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NU9v8_K-uuk&t=4s



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