

Pinworm

Description: The male adult is 9 to 12 millimeters long; the female reaches a length of up to 150 millimeters and has a characteristically long, pin-like tail.

Predilection sites: Colon, anus.

Geographic distribution: Common throughout the United States.

Life cycle: Adult female worms migrate out of the anus and lay eggs on the perianal skin. The eggs, which are covered with a sticky fluid, adhere to the area. Depending on temperature, the eggs embryonate and become infective in 3 to 5 days. The host animal may increase the severity of its infection by biting at the larvae and ingesting them. Eggs can also drop into feed and water, and be ingested as a result. Ingested larvae penetrate the lining of the colon, where they feed on the mucosa. Maturity is reached in 4 to 5 months.

Significance: Chronically infected horses have a very poor appearance. Heavy infections also cause severe irritability.

Clinical effects on host: Some ulceration in the intestine can result from the feeding of larvae on the mucosa. Most of the clinical significance results from the intense itching caused by the sticky fluid surrounding pinworm eggs. In addition to loss of condition and poor appearance, horses suffer from self-inflicted wounds resulting from biting and scratching. Such wounds are subject to secondary bacterial infection. Severe cases can lead to nervousness and anorexia. Rubbing and scratching of the perianal region causes irritation, dull hair coat and loss of hair – a condition known as rat-tail.

Diagnosis: Masses of whitish-yellow eggs may be seen in the perianal region. Transparent adhesive tape can be used to collect eggs for microscopic examination.