

SUMMER 2016

Summer has shown up in fits and starts. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thanks for your support in 2016. We look forward to seeing you and your animals again in 2017.

Grass Seed Issues

It is grass seed season again. After the prolonged spring season this year the amount of grass around is astounding with literally millions of grass seeds waiting to cause trouble. These innocuous looking little things can cause a surprising amount of harm to animals. The pointed end of the seed can easily become embedded in skin, often in between toes, in eyes, down ears, or even up noses. If not found and removed early enough the seeds can disappear under the skin and migrate through the body, tracking infection with them. Sometimes dogs will breathe grass seeds in, which can cause severe chest infections.

Seeds only form in long grass, so keep grass short at home over spring and summer and don't allow your animals to go into long grass during your walks.

Keep your pet's hair short as seeds are more likely to get caught in long hair. It can be particularly helpful to keep the hair of the paws and ears as short as possible.

Check your pet for grass seeds every day, particularly in between every toe, under the tail, and in the armpit and groin regions. If a grass seed is too deep for you to remove, or if you can only see a small pink lump or wound rather than the actual seed, then it is best to have your pet seen by a vet as soon as possible before the seed has time to travel any further. The longer a seed is left, the harder it can be to locate and remove.



An extremely bad case of grass seeds! Running through long grass in a paddock can see literally hundreds of grass seeds end up in the coat.



Typical appearance of a grass seed abscess in between the toes.

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Other signs of grass seeds can be lameness, licking at paws, sudden onset of head shaking, sneezing, swelling and discharge from an eye, or pawing at an ear, eye or nose. If you notice any of these symptoms it is important to take your animal to the vet.

Grass seed removal can be very simple in a well behaved pet or may require sedation or anaesthesia if the seed is well lodged or the area is very sore. Sometimes surgery is necessary to open up a suspected grass seed abscess to locate the seed. Antibiotics will usually be prescribed along with an anti-inflammatory to help reduce pain and discomfort.

Heartworm and Mosquitoes

A common thing that veterinarians hear when discussing heartworm prevention with their clients is: “He doesn’t need it because he doesn’t see other dogs”. Unfortunately this is not effective protection against heartworm because the disease is spread from an infected dog to an uninfected dog via mosquitoes. If your dog lives in an urban environment then the risk of heartworm transmission is very real even if they just stay at home in the backyard.



Heartworm is a nasty disease and at worst can be fatal. Microscopic juvenile worms are injected under the skin by a mosquito bite and work their way into a peripheral blood vessel. From here they float along in the blood until they reach the heart. As they grow they can begin to occupy large amounts of space in the chambers of the heart and the pulmonary vessels. This can lead to heart failure and in severe cases death. The adult worms also reproduce and send out microscopic juvenile worms into the bloodstream where they can be sucked up by biting mosquitoes and carried away to other dogs.

This year after all the spring rains we are seeing huge numbers of mosquitoes in our area. As such the risk of heartworm transmission is greatly multiplied. Nowadays there are very effective heartworm preventatives that are much more convenient than the daily tablets that had to be given in the distant past. The usual treatments are either given monthly as a tablet or liquid on the back of the neck, or a once a year injection.

If your dog is not on heartworm prevention we would strongly encourage you to see your veterinarian to organise a blood test looking first for any evidence of heartworm infection. Following this starting on an effective preventative, especially this year with swarms of mozzies flying around, is the safest course of action for your pet.

NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST

We produce a 4 page newsletter every season to keep our clients informed about the goings on at Warby St Veterinary Hospital and the Wangaratta Equine Hospital. We send the newsletter out with our statements each time it is printed, but also deliver it electronically by email. If you would like to receive the newsletter in your email inbox you can either email me your address at tim@warbyvet.com.au or fill out the slip below and return it to Warby St Vet Hospital or Wangaratta Equine Hospital in person or by snail mail.

YES! I'D LIKE TO RECEIVE THE QUARTERLY WARBY ST VET HOSPITAL NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL!

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Tinsel Terror!

'Tis the season for holidays and festiveness and many of us are putting up the Christmas tree and all the decorations that go along with it. As usual us veterinarians have to bring a downer to all this celebration and give a warning to help prevent major problems arising for our pets over the Christmas period. Cats and dogs are often keen to get involved in the Christmas tree decorating and lots of the things we put up as decoration if swallowed can end up causing intestinal obstruction. Of most concern is the ubiquitous tinsel which cats seem particularly partial to playing with. If it is swallowed by a cat it becomes a linear foreign body in the intestinal tract much like string or wool (not letting your cat play with a ball of wool is another of our killjoy attitudes). As the intestines contract in their wave like motion they bunch themselves up along the string core of the tinsel in a concertina like effect. With time the string core of the tinsel can start to saw through the intestinal wall which allows intestinal contents and bacteria to leak out into the abdominal cavity. The ensuing peritonitis can be extremely difficult to rectify.

If you see your cat ingest tinsel prompt veterinary treatment is essential. Symptoms of tinsel ingestion are like other foreign objects – persistent vomiting and inappetence. If you suspect your cat has eaten some tinsel the earlier it is removed the better. Removal from the stomach or inducing vomiting in the very early stages carries a good prognosis. If things have progressed to the bunching of the intestines stage then abdominal surgery is necessary and can be very challenging depending on how far things have progressed. If you can see part of the tinsel in the mouth it is best not to try and pull it out because if the tinsel has lodged in the intestines already you can greatly damage the intestines by pulling it out.

By all means hang the tinsel on the tree, but just remember that your risk averse veterinarian warned you of what can happen.

As an interesting aside tinsel has had a long dangerous history. Originally it was made from aluminium paper which was considered a major fire risk. Subsequently they started making it from lead, which stopped in the 1970s when it was considered unsafe for children. Modern tinsel is made of plastic and is considered safe, except to curious cats and dogs!

Tim Craig BVSc
Warby St Veterinary Hospital



Biting Insects and Viruses in Horses

As we head into the warmer months the swarms of biting insects are starting to arrive en masse. As well as being incredibly annoying to your horse these pests can also carry viral diseases that are injected when they bite. Of principle interest in North East Victoria are Murray Valley Encephalitis Virus and Ross River Fever Virus.

Murray Valley Encephalitis is a virus spread by mosquitoes that causes neurological signs. It is more common in Northern Australia especially towards the end of the wet season. However, periodically outbreaks in South Eastern Australia occur especially if we have season heavy rains and flooding that allow mosquito populations to increase. The last outbreak we saw was in 2011, where Murray Valley encephalitis was detected in the North East along with Ross River Fever and another virus called Kunjin, also spread by biting insects. It is important to remember that Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) and Ross River Fever (RRF) can also be contracted by humans when they are bitten by mosquitoes that carry these diseases. The recent wetter winter and spring in our area have created perfect conditions for a similar outbreak to occur again and the Victorian government are asking horse owners to be particularly vigilant. Humans are not infected through direct contact with a sick horse as the virus needs to pass through the mosquito vector for successful infection to occur.



The MVE virus has been detected in a variety of species—pigs, horses, wild birds, poultry and marsupials. Wild water fowl are believed to be the primary reservoir of disease in our area. In many infections no clinical signs are seen. However in horses and humans the virus has been known to create weakness, dizziness, incoordination, depression and other neurological abnormalities. In many of the horse cases we have seen the horse is initially wobbly on its feet and off its food. In more severe cases horses may lie down and be unable to get back upright again. These symptoms mimic other illnesses such as snakebite or even Hendra virus so diagnosis can be challenging. Blood testing can be done to look for evidence of the disease. As MVE is a viral infection treatment centres around supporting the horse through the episode with oral or IV fluids and monitoring.

The Victorian government maintains small groups of poultry along the Murray River that are regularly tested for MVE and RRF to act as an early warning that an outbreak is on its way.

Ross River Fever Virus is another virus that can affect horses and humans and is spread by mosquitoes. It can be a very debilitating virus in humans. In horses you may see stiffness and soreness due to pain or swelling in the joints or muscles. Coughing is possible. A fever and symptoms that wax and wane are often a feature and can make diagnosis more difficult. Neurological signs like wobbliness and reluctance to move are also possible making differentiation from MVE a challenge. Horses that recover from the virus are also prone to relapse in times of stress. Blood testing to show antibodies against the Ross River Fever Virus are increasing is the usual method of diagnosis.

Preventing horses from being bitten by mosquitoes can obviously be very difficult, but there are some things that you can do to help. Removal of any sources of stagnant water from around their paddocks limits areas where mosquitoes can congregate and breed (eg. Old buckets, old tyres, unused troughs). Commercial mosquito traps are available. Summer rugs and fly veils can be useful. Some mosquito repellents are also available. Stabling during the dawn and dusk hours when mosquitoes are most active allows more effective localised mosquito prevention due to the confined space.

If your horse is unwell, wobbly on its feet or lying down please contact your veterinarian to allow prompt examination and differentiation of the possible causes of these symptoms during the summer months.