

# Eden Veterinary Practice

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Summer 2009 Horse Newsletter  
In this newsletter  
Ragwort, Laminitis and  
Vaccination amnesty month



## Ragwort

Ragwort is highly poisonous to livestock and should be controlled in grassland. Due to its toxicity SEERAD has legal powers requiring its control. Cattle and horses are highly sensitive. Sheep, goats and deer are more tolerant. The poisons in the plant damage the liver. Due to the amount of extra reserve the liver has, 2/3rds of the liver have to be damaged before the horse is unwell. One of the functions of the liver is to remove toxins from the blood stream. If these toxins are not removed they build up and affect the nervous system. Leading to signs which include aimless wandering, drowsiness and head pressing. There is no specific treatment if poisoned.

Dead and dying Ragwort is more attractive than live ragwort to stock and remains poisonous. The wilting process, particularly when associated with weedkiller use, increases the soluble sugar content of ragwort foliage. Cutting ragwort particularly for hay is therefore dangerous. Control of low populations can be maintained by pulling (but not cutting), and by older sheep or goats grazing overwinter/early spring. For higher populations where weed killers can be used, grazed pastures should be treated from late April to late May. Horses should be kept off these pastures until there are no dead ragwort on them. Grassland to be cut for hay or silage should also be treated in the autumn of the preceding year. For long-term control, improve grass management to promote a dense vigorous sward.

## How do you control ragwort?



Complete prevention of poisoning from ragwort is only possible by denying stock access to infested fields or feed. This is usually not possible, so removing the weed to levels where it does not create problems, and reducing the likelihood of re-infestation should be the aim of management strategies.

Cutting is not recommended, although it may reduce seed production it can promote perennialization of ragwort, which will come back the following year more vigorously.

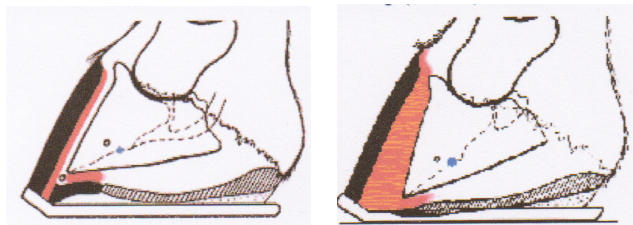
Pulling/digging can be quite effective. However, the technique can leave root fragments from which new plants can develop in the bare space left by removal of the parent plant. Manual pulling/digging is only recommended for light populations. Gloves should be worn as ragwort is poisonous to humans.

**Unfortunately, herbicide (weed killing) treatments are not fully effective and 'half-kill' can occur. This can cause serious problems as the plant does not die and can be more attractive to stock until it recovers fully from the treatment.** The options are to await full recovery before letting cattle or horses back on the grass, or repeating the spray treatment and re-await rotting of the treated plants again.

For further information on ragwort please contact the practice. Other sources of advice are at [www.worldhorsewelfare.org](http://www.worldhorsewelfare.org) and Defra has code of practice on how to prevent the spread of ragwort at [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

## Laminitis

Laminitis is one of the most painful medication conditions of horse and can occur in any breed of pony or horse. The laminae are the interwoven structure that attach the hoof capsule to the pedal bone. Laminitis is the swelling of the laminae. Given that on one side is the hard hoof capsule and on the other is the pedal bone, there is no space for them to swell in to so it is easy to appreciate where the pain comes from.



The diagram to the left shows swelling to the laminae between the hoof capsule and the pedal bone. In the diagram on the right the laminitis has progressed to have both pedal bone sinking and rotation. When sinking occurs this is called founder.

Diagrams and picture below courtesy of A McDiarmid. Clyde Veterinary Group.

Laminitis is most commonly caused by over eating of lush grass. Unfortunately as the grass starts to grow each spring the amount of grass consumed can be difficult to judge because if it is eaten as quickly as it grows you will never see it. However if the grass on the verges or in the gardens is growing rest assured the grass in the paddocks will be as well.

Other causes of laminitis are too much feeding, over loading a limb due to injury in another limb, or concussion from working on hard surfaces, or endotoxaemia. Other medications and conditions such as Cushings and Equine Metabolic Syndrome can also increase the chances of horses or ponies having laminitis.



Acute laminitis presents as a sudden severe pain with reluctance to move, there may also be sweating. There is a typical laminitic stance when the horse rocks back on to it's heels to try to remove some of the pressure from the laminae. At this stage heat may be felt in the hoof and a digital pulse may also be felt.

If your horse gets laminitis it is important to contact your vet who will examine the horse and provide drugs which reduce the pain and swelling of the laminae. They may also apply frog supports and advise on management to speed the recovery and reduce the chances of laminitis recurring. One point to note is that laminitic foods are to help prevent laminitis from occurring. If your horse has laminitis it needs medical treatment, merely changing it's food at this stage will not treat the condition.

## Vaccination amnesty

Every year horses fall prey to infectious diseases, including life-threatening tetanus. That's why this practice supports National Vaccination Month, which aims to ensure every animal is fully protected.

To be eligible for the scheme your horse must be over 12 months of age and have be unvaccinated or have lapsed by more than 3 months. If your horse is eligible it will receive a free second dose of tetanus or flu/tetanus vaccine during the month of June depending what initial vaccination it receives. This scheme does not cover the call out fees. However all participating horses will receive a free of charge wormer.

For more information and to get your voucher please log on to [www.vaccinationmonth.co.uk](http://www.vaccinationmonth.co.uk) or contact Eden Veterinary Practice on Eden Veterinary Practice on 01334 650888.