

INTERNAL PARASITES IN ALPACA

PART 2

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In the last edition of “NEW ZEALAND ALPACA” we looked at issues concerning nematodes or gastrointestinal worms. Gastrointestinal worms are by far the most prevalent of the internal parasites that can affect alpacas. Stomach worms are common place, and it is likely that the majority of animals in your herds will have a number of worms and worm eggs, particularly if you have other classes of stock sharing the same paddocks. A regular worming program will reduce the numbers of worms present and will prevent the problems associated when the numbers multiply and become too great a burden for an animal.

There are, however, a few other internal parasites that are less common but can adversely affect alpacas and other classes of stock. To date we have discussed intestinal worms and there is one more parasite of note that can on occasion reside in the intestinal tract of an alpaca and that is the Tapeworm or Cestode.

Tapeworms

There are a multitude of different cestodes that normally affect carnivores such as dogs and cats in New Zealand, as well as foxes, wolves, dingoes and coyotes in other parts of the world. In some instances the alpaca becomes the intermediate host for these worms which may lead to a condition called Hydatid Disease.

Hydatid Disease (*Echinococcus granulosus*)

This small but common tapeworm is found throughout the world and can infest many carnivores (including pet dogs). The tapeworm has little effect on its carnivore host and may remain undetected for months if not years. The worm, however, will release eggs which in turn will be expelled in the faeces of the host and can contaminate the pasture on which alpacas browse.

If an alpaca (intermediate host) ingests these eggs they can hatch in the intestine and then burrow through the wall of the stomach and make their way, normally, to the lungs or liver of the unsuspecting host. Having reached the lungs or liver, these oncospheres form cysts. These cysts can develop over a period of months and reach a size of 8 to 10cm in diameter.

The cycle of this particular tapeworm is complete when the intermediate host dies and a carnivore eats the offal containing the cyst.

Apart from the surgical removal of the cysts, there is no treatment for an infested animal. However, unless other circumstances are involved, the alpaca will not normally display any clinical signs of infestation.

Prevention

The fact that we do not have a problem with large carnivores roaming our paddocks as in other alpaca-producing countries makes the control of this particular tapeworm in New Zealand fairly simple. As long as pet dogs are wormed regularly and access by dogs to alpaca paddocks is limited, hydatid cysts should not be a problem.

Monieziasis

A rarer species of cestode found in New Zealand is a much larger intestinal tapeworm called *Moniezia expansa*. Unlike *E. granulosus*, herbivores such as sheep and alpacas are the end or “definitive” host. The intermediate host for this particular worm is a soil mite. This particular “nasty” can be nearly 2 cm wide and grow up to a staggering 6 metres in length.

The adult worm lives in the intestinal tract of the alpaca and can cause problems with digestion and blockage. The adult worm sheds egg containing segments which are clearly visible in the faeces of the host. Infestation can occur in animals as young as 6 weeks of age so a regular check of the dung pile is always a good management practice to assess the nutritional health of your animals.

The animals that are at greatest risk are neonates, yet to learn of the protocols of eating around dung piles where eggs and soil mites will be concentrated.

Clinical signs

Alpaca become depressed and show signs of ill thrift and weight loss.

Cure

The use of wormers such as Dectomax and Ivomectin will have no effect on *Moniezia* tapeworm. Animals can be successfully treated with a drench containing Praziquantel marketed in New Zealand as “Adept”. If in doubt consult your vet.

Prevention

The control of this particular worm is very tricky as infected soil mites can remain in the soil for six months or more. If identified on a property, prevention ought to be based on breaking the lifecycle of the tapeworm by reducing the soil mite population. Cultivation of the paddock and taking a hay crop is an advised way of doing this.

The preferred host for this particular worm is sheep, so once again where possible, avoid mixed stocking with sheep and alpacas. 

