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Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome
in New Zealand racehorses

A thesis presented
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Veterinary Science
At Massey University, Palmerston North
New Zealand

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2006

Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome in New Zealand Racehorses

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Abstract

Aims

To establish the prevalence of gastric ulcers in New Zealand racehorses.

Methods

A prevalence study was conducted during 2003 and 2004 in New Zealand. One hundred and seventy one horses from 24 trainers across New Zealand were examined with gastroscopy as part of the study. Images of the examination were recorded and reviewed. The stomachs were assigned an ordinal score based on the severity of the gastric ulceration present.

Results

There were 171 horses in the study: 133 Thoroughbreds and 38 Standardbreds. One hundred and fifty one (88.3%) of these had evidence of EGUS. There was no significant difference in the prevalence of ulceration between the two breeds ($p=0.51$) or between horses of differing ages ($p=0.56$). There were 141 horses kept at pasture for at least four hours per day, of these 125 (89%) had EGUS. Thirteen horses were kept at pasture full time and all of these had EGUS. Seventeen horses were stabled full time and 16 (94.1%) of these had EGUS. There was no significant difference between the different housing groups and the prevalence or severity of EGUS ($p=0.33$ and 0.13 respectively), and there was no significant difference in the severity of gastric ulceration ($p=0.12$) between the horses grazed on different pasture qualities. There was no significant difference in the prevalence ($p=0.26$) or severity ($p=0.49$) of gastric ulceration based on the duration of training.

Conclusions

The prevalence of EGUS in New Zealand racehorses is similar to that reported elsewhere for horses in active race training. The type of turnout that these horses receive does not appear to be protective for EGUS.

Clinical relevance

Pasture turnout alone may not be protective against EGUS in racehorses that are in active training. Gastric ulceration is a common problem in New Zealand racehorses and may be a cause of decreased performance in these animals.

Key words

Horse, equine, gastric ulceration, pasture, prevalence

Abbreviations

EGUC Equine Gastric Ulcer Council

EGUS Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the New Zealand Equine Research Foundation for providing the funding necessary to complete this project.

Thank you to my supervisors Janene Kingston and Tony Mogg for their guidance and patience.

The project would not have been successful without the help of the veterinarians who made me welcome in their practices and introduced me to their trainers. Nor would it have been possible without the generosity of these trainers, owners and stablehands who allowed me access to their horses and cheerily tolerated the disruption to their daily routine.

Thanks are also due to my fantastic technical assistants Graeme King and Georgette Soppet, for organising me, and making sure that things ran smoothly on our trips away.

Thank you to Dave Rutherford for covering the clinic whenever I was away.

Thank you to Dr Chris Rogers for his help with the statistical programs on the computer.

Finally, thank you to Jamie for her help with putting all this together and for her support over the last three years.

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