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EQUINE CLINIC, RATHMELL, BD24 9LA



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EQUINE NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2014

Autumn Castrate Offer

As usual throughout October and November we are offering a discount on standing castrations if paid for at the time.

For castrations done at your own yard or stable there will be a discount of **15%** plus your usual visit charge but if the work is done at our Equine Clinic at Rathmell there will be a discount of **20%** and the benefit of no visit charge.

This offer does not include any drugs prescribed for post castration care or tetanus antitoxin.



Please contact Kate, Sarah or Ruth at the surgery on 01729 823538 to book an appointment or for more information.

Cushing's Disease Free Lab Fees



Talk About Laminitis is a national initiative provided by Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, to improve awareness and understanding of the real underlying causes of laminitis. They are offering free ACTH laboratory fees to detect equine cushing's disease until October, to help assist early identification of laminitis prone horses and ponies. If you feel your horse might be at risk from cushing's disease we recommend that you discuss this with one of our vets.

Should you then decide your horse requires testing and wish to take advantage of this offer please visit www.talkaboutlaminitis.co.uk to claim your voucher.*

Please contact a member of our equine team for more information on **01729 823538**.

*Only one voucher may be claimed per horse. Vouchers can only be used against lab fees for newly diagnosed cushing's disease and **not** against follow up blood tests.

Vaccination Amnesty Month



Throughout **October** if your horse starts a **new** vaccination course, the 2nd vaccination will be given **free of charge** - a saving of **£40.00**.

Please note that this offer does not include the first or third vaccination, nor does it cover any visit fees.

However, if you book the appointment on your allocated routine zone visit day or bring your horse into our equine clinic at Rathmell you will bypass the visit fee.

For more information or to book an appointment please contact the surgery on 01729 823538

Staff News

We are pleased to welcome on board a new member of staff this month. Clare Penter (BVetMed, MRCVS) joins the equine team having recently moved to the area from Cornwall.

She qualified from Royal Veterinary College London in 2000 and has work in mixed practice with an equine bias in both Cornwall and Australia. Clare is experienced in all aspects of routine equine veterinary work, including field surgery, anaesthesia, lameness work-ups, radiography and dentistry.

She owns four horses and ponies and is a regular participant in local shows and events.

RAGWORT POISONING



Ragwort poisoning is one of the most common causes of liver disease in horses and ponies in the UK. Ragwort is a tall plant with yellow flowers. Its scientific name is *Senecio jacobea* and it contains a poison (toxin) which is also found in some other plants, such as Lantana and some Heliotropes. The poison is found in variable concentrations in different parts of the plant and at different stages of its growth. The plants are not palatable and horses will not usually eat them unless pasture is heavily contaminated or there is little other food available. However, the poison is very stable and remains toxic even when the dried plant is incorporated into hay. The most common cause of ragwort poisoning is therefore from chronic (long-term)

eating of hay which includes dried ragwort.



What are the signs of ragwort poisoning? Unless very large quantities of fresh plants are eaten, the symptoms of poisoning are usually not seen until 4 weeks to 6 months after eating the plants, or sometimes even years later. Small doses of the poison gradually accumulate in the horse's liver where it causes damage to the liver cells and subsequent scarring, eventually causing the liver to shrink in size. Symptoms of liver disease only develop when the organ is no longer able to compensate for the loss of functional tissue. Symptoms usually develop quite suddenly, although in some horses and ponies slight illness can precede more severe symptoms. Early signs include loss of appetite, depression, diarrhoea, weight loss and mild jaundice. More severe symptoms include marked jaundice and collapse or abnormal behaviour, which can

range from profound depression to compulsive walking and pressing the head against objects, e.g. walls, apparent blindness, photosensitization (excessive sensitivity to sunlight) and convulsions. These behavioural abnormalities are caused by toxic effects on the horse's brain (hepatic encephalopathy).



How is ragwort poisoning diagnosed and treated? The diagnosis of ragwort poisoning is based on clinical signs and laboratory tests. A history of ingestion of ragwort is often unclear due to the time lapse between ingestion and the development of clinical signs. Laboratory tests, including the measurement of liver enzymes, bile acids and bilirubin levels in the horse's blood, confirm a diagnosis of liver disease and assess the liver's ability to function. To confirm the diagnosis of ragwort poisoning, a liver biopsy is required to demonstrate the typical microscopic abnormalities (pathology). If these are not found, the biopsy may help to suggest other possible causes of liver damage. Follow-up liver biopsies help to monitor progression of the condition in horses

receiving treatment for ragwort poisoning.

As symptoms often only develop late in the course of the disease, treatment is rarely successful for severely poisoned horses, especially those with behavioural abnormalities. Feeding a special diet to try to reduce the severity of nervous symptoms can help in the short term in some cases. The scar tissue which develops in the liver cannot be replaced by normal liver tissue, but less severely poisoned horses can sometimes be helped to compensate for their loss of liver tissue. Other in-contact horses should be examined for signs of poisoning so that they can receive treatment and extra care. Blood screening tests for liver damage and abnormal liver function are the first steps.



How can I prevent ragwort poisoning? Ragwort is a biennial plant. In the first year a flattish crown of branched leaves is formed. This flat crown is fairly resistant to mowing and is often not noticed. In the second year yellow flowers are produced on stems which are up to approximately 80 cm high. Any plants that are found should be pulled up by their roots (always wear gloves as it can be toxic to humans via absorption through the skin) and disposed of away from livestock. Do not leave cut or pulled plants in the paddock or they may be eaten when they have dried and are more palatable. Plants on adjacent land should be removed to avoid the spreading of seed back into your paddocks. Always ensure that there is adequate grazing or alternative food sources such as hay, so that your horse or pony is not tempted to eat

any ragwort which may have been missed.