

Ragwort Kills!

IS YOUR HORSE AT RISK?

Ragwort is the most common cause of poisoning in equines in the UK.

Little can be done once the symptoms appear - loss of condition, poor appetite and constipation and sometimes jaundice. In the later stages, nervous signs develop - aimless uncoordinated movement, pressing of head against solid objects with eventual partial paralysis, once these signs appear death will follow fairly swiftly.

Ragwort poisoning is fatal once the symptoms have appeared it is impossible for the animal to recover. It is therefore vitally important that this noxious weed is removed from all land that horses have access to.

Death of your horse by Ragwort poisoning is totally preventable by taking the proper precautions.

How will I prevent it?

Small ragwort infestations.

Pulling - this can be done by hand or by using a special ragfork it needs to be done before the flowering has completed and is more easily pulled in the spring when the plant is immature. Always wear gloves when pulling ragwort and if possible goggles and face masks. Once the plant has been pulled up (roots and all), it is just as dangerous as it is more palatable to the horse when it has dried - it should therefore be removed from the field and destroyed.

Cutting - cutting does not destroy the plant instead it stimulates side growth and encourages regrowth. For this reason cutting is not recommended.

Large infestations.

Spraying - the use of herbicides is often the most effective method but applying the most appropriate herbicide at the correct time of year is essential. Best time for spraying land used for grazing is to apply the herbicides in April or May. If the pasture is to be used make hay, spraying should be carried out during September or October of the preceding year when the weather is mild. Horses should be removed from the pasture prior to the spraying and not allowed access until the plants have died and been removed. Care should be taken to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Spraying should be regarded as a short term measure. A single application of herbicide cannot give permanent clearance, where problems persist spraying should take place every autumn or every second spring.

For advice on the choice of herbicide and application technique, seek advice from your local agrochemical distributor (see Yellow Pages) and follow product label advice and codes of practice to ensure the product is used safely.

