

Hydatids – they are still out there!

Dr David Jenkins, Senior Research Fellow, School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences, Charles Sturt University, is an internationally recognised leader in the subject of tapeworms, particularly Hydatid tapeworm (*Echinococcus Granulosus*). Cyst forming tapeworms are an issue in the sheep meat trade, but Hydatids are an issue for humans, particularly those with dogs in rural and semi-rural regions.

The WormBoss team has asked David to provide some information on this parasite and how to control it so that you and yours do not find yourselves in need of surgery.

“Hydatids are something you may have heard about, know it is bad if you catch it, but can’t quite remember what it is.

Well, for those of you who are a bit vague on the topic, here is a reminder.

Hydatid disease is caused by a parasite. This parasite normally infects livestock and dogs, but it can also infect people. Hydatids are large fluid-filled cysts developing mainly in the liver and/or lungs of infected sheep, cattle or people.

Hydatid disease is caught by accidentally swallowing eggs passed by tiny Hydatid tapeworms that live in the intestines of dogs. These eggs pass into the environment in dog faeces and can remain viable on pasture for at least a year. Sheep become infected grazing contaminated pasture, for people this may occur from handling infected dogs, inhaling eggs passed in dust on windy days or from eggs transmitted by flies. Flies can consume hundreds of eggs whilst feeding on dog faeces and then pass these eggs in their faeces onto food.

Hydatid cysts grow slowly over several years into large fluid-filled cysts, inside of which develops the next generation of Hydatid tapeworms. In humans these cysts can be of several litres capacity and infection may be life-threatening.

If dogs eat Hydatid cysts they become infected with Hydatid tapeworms. You will never know if a dog is infected because the worms cause no illness to the dog and are so small (2-4mm) you are unlikely to see segments passed in the faeces.

In Australia, particularly in areas of the eastern states associated with the Great Dividing Range and in an area in south western Western Australia, the Hydatid parasite is being maintained in wildlife, wild dogs (dingoes and dingo/domestic dog hybrids) and various species of wallaby and kangaroo. In some areas, foxes, feral pigs and wombats may also be involved. The wild dogs and foxes spread the eggs that are eaten by the other species with transmission occurring in a predator/prey interaction. This wildlife reservoir can also act as an important source of infection to livestock, humans and domestic dogs.

To control Hydatid disease here are 5 simple tips:

- Worm your dogs (working dogs and pets) monthly with a de-worming product that says on the label it is effective against Hydatids.
- Never feed raw offal (liver/lungs/hearts/kidneys) from sheep, cattle or any species of wildlife to dogs. Freeze it for at least 14 days at -10° to -15°C or cook it thoroughly.
- Secure dogs at night and when not working so they do not wander and scavenge on carcasses.
- Put all offal in a dog-proof pit, and where possible, the bodies of stock that have died in the paddock.

Engage in good personal hygiene; always ensure you and the kids wash your hands after handling dogs and especially before you eat.”