

Cattle Worm Egg Counts: Faecal sample collection guide

What is a faecal worm egg count?

Some worms that cause disease in cattle produce eggs that are shed in the faeces. By counting these eggs using a microscope, we can estimate the worm burden being deposited on the pasture and use it to guide treatment in the future. The advantages of this approach include prevention of wormer resistance, and cost savings through avoiding unnecessary treatments. To reduce costs, samples from groups of animals can be combined ('pooled') to give an average value. **It is vitally important that samples are collected and stored properly, to ensure an accurate result.**

When should I do a faecal worm egg count?

If spring born suckled calves, late summer

If autumn born calves, 4-6 weeks after turning out in the spring/early summer

Thereafter at regular intervals throughout the grazing season (every 3-4 weeks)

Before you start:

For monitoring tests, cattle should be healthy and have had their normal access to pasture and/or feed. If they are scouring, this may affect the result.

Ensure you have plenty of pots or bags. Pots are available free of charge from our practice. It is important to use proper faecal sampling containers, otherwise the lab will apply a handling surcharge. You will need one container per animal sampled.

Taking the sample:

Wearing gloves, collect fresh faeces from a recent, warm dung pat. If the cattle are lying down and you get them to stand up, they will often then pass faeces.

Collect at least **40g faeces per animal** (about 4 heaped dessert spoonfuls), from at least 3 different areas of the dung pat.

Store the samples individually in pots, ensuring all the air is excluded. If using pots, this means filling them to the brim. **DO NOT MIX SAMPLES FROM DIFFERENT ANIMALS.** The lab will combine exactly equal amounts from each animal to ensure accurate results.

For routine monitoring, please sample at least 10 cattle per management group, at random. Do not pick out animals that you think look especially good or poor, as this will affect the result.

We want the result to reflect the average.

Keep samples in an airtight container and deliver them to the practice as soon as possible, preferably the same day but within 48 hours at the latest. If you have to store them before delivery, keep them somewhere cool and dark.

Please note we can only accept faecal samples **Monday to Friday**, as they are sent by courier to an external lab. When delivering to the practice, be aware that we will ask you about the age and number of animals in the group, the condition of the animals, any scouring, and details about any recent worming treatments.

Results:

Once the results are back from the lab, you will receive a call from a vet, to discuss the results and advise you on how to interpret them. If you do not hear anything within 5 working days, please call us to follow up.

KEY POINT: The result is only useful if the sample has been properly collected and stored!