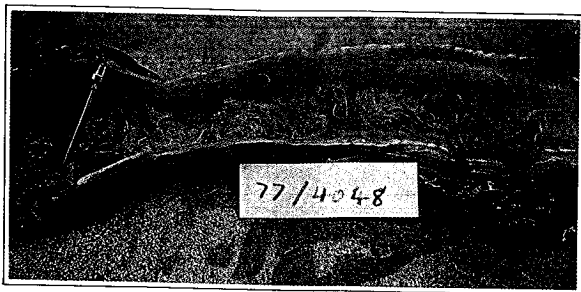


## Lungworm — a problem in early fawners?



Very heavy lungworm burden in the trachea (windpipe) of a Red deer fawn  
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ON MANY deer farms, it is normal practice to start drenching fawns at weaning in March. On other farms it may begin three to four weeks earlier, while the fawns are still at foot.

Research at Invermay has shown that in the case of early fawning herds, it may be necessary to drench much earlier if lungworm is to be controlled.

In order to assess the impact of lungworm on these early fawns, we faecal sampled young fawns of known age in October-early November to obtain information on when they start shedding lungworm larvae and the level of infection with age.

Whether or not fawns will have high lungworm burdens depends on factors that can vary over seasons or between seasons, such as temperature, moisture, pasture length and the level of shedding of lungworm larvae by hinds. All have a bearing on the development of larvae on pasture to the infective stage.

Larval output by fawns will continue to increase until fawns are drenched or develop immunity. Some contact with lungworm is essential if fawns are to develop and maintain immunity but this contact need only be with the migrating infective larvae. Heavy burdens result in reduced weight gain, illthrift and possibly death.

When interpreting our results it is important to remember that the interval between a fawn first ingesting infective lungworm larvae with pasture and these lungworm maturing and starting producing larvae which appear in the fawn's faeces is about 21 days (the pre-patent period). The results show that fawns generally can start shedding larvae from about eight to 10 weeks of age. That means they were ingesting infected pasture from about

five weeks of age. However, there were two fawns with high burdens before seven weeks of age and they were twins. Possibly these twins, the only twins in the study, were not receiving as much milk as other fawns and being hungry, were nibbling more grass (with infective larvae) at an earlier age. What is the significance of all this? If early born fawns are first drenched when normal-born fawns are drenched, they may have built up larger lungworm burdens than the normal-born fawns.

As a result they may have suffered greater damage from the lungworm. Also, if they are running with the normal-born fawns they will be an additional source of lungworm infection to the normal-born fawns. It would be safer and more practical to run the early fawning hinds separately.

There are other possibilities.

There could be some merit in shifting hinds and fawns onto clean pasture before the fawns are aged five weeks (such as in paddocks from which silage or hay has recently been made). Otherwise drenching fawns first at eight weeks of age could be necessary if warm-wet conditions prevail favouring lungworm larvae.

So far we have not researched any of these options, but based on our current knowledge of lungworm we would expect measurable benefits from either option. Alternatively, fawn lungworm burdens could be monitored by taking faecal samples from about six fawns in each herd every week or two through January and February, submitting them to a MAF Animal Health Laboratory through your veterinarian and drenching the fawns when the results indicate significant burdens are developing. □