

Pighealth BYTES

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Roundworms VIII

Your own reference source on pig health



Animine

BCF

Berg & Schmidt

CCPA Group

Coventry Chemicals

ECM

Acanthocephala

Acanthocephala, known as the 'thorny headed worm', is a very large helminth, sometimes exceeding 40cm. It has a dusty coral pink colour and the head has a visible spiny proboscis with which it attaches to the wall of the jejunum.

Depending on its hydration state, its body may be swollen or flattened and wrinkled so it may be mistaken for either an ascarid or a cestode. However, ascarids have no proboscis and do not attach, and cestodes have true segments, not just wrinkles.

Life cycle

Adult thorny headed worms lay 70-110 eggs in the pig's faeces. These eggs have a brown, three layered shell, an almond shape and contain a larva. This larva has an ellipsoidal shape and needle-like hooks on one end.

When an egg is ingested by certain beetles an infective larva develops within them in about three months. The larva begins its development in the beetle larva, but it survives through metamorphosis to appear in the adult beetle. Pigs acquire the larva from either stage while rooting. Once in the pig, the larva matures to an adult. The prepatent period is 2-3 months.

Pathology

The thorny headed worm inserts its proboscis into the jejunal wall and because it is longer than the intestinal wall is thick, perforation may occur. Usually, the pig produces a fibrous connective tissue encapsulation of the proboscis, sealing off any perforation. These nodules are large and easily seen at necropsy. There are more nodules than adult thorny headed worms suggesting that release and reattachment may occur. Nodules regress about one month after the worm leaves.

There are few clinical signs, but when intestinal perforation occurs there may be abdominal pain, diarrhoea and emaciation.

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