



# THE INS AND OUTS OF CHICKEN WORMS

A Complete Guide



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# HOW THIS GUIDE WAS BUILT

There's no shortage of opinions when it comes to worming chickens.

Ask a few chicken keepers and you'll often receive very different answers—many delivered with complete confidence. This guide was developed to help backyard flock owners better understand worms, parasite pressure, monitoring, testing, treatment options, and practical flock management, without fear, pressure, or unnecessary complication.

Rather than relying on a single opinion, product, or approach, information within this guide was considered from a combination of:

- Practical backyard poultry experience
- Current Australian product labels and approved use information
- Veterinary guidance and poultry health resources
- Published scientific and educational material relating to parasite biology and flock management
- Established poultry husbandry practices

Where possible, greater emphasis has been placed on registered product information, veterinary guidance, and established scientific understanding, with practical experience used to help translate technical information into everyday flock decisions.

This guide also recognises that no two flocks are the same. Where evidence is limited or evolving, we have aimed to explain uncertainty rather than present opinions as absolute facts.

The goal is simple: Help chicken keepers feel less overwhelmed, more confident, and better equipped to make decisions that suit their flock.

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This publication is intended for educational and informational purposes only. Information within this guide reflects a combination of practical backyard poultry experience, published educational resources, veterinary guidance, and current Australian product information available at the time of publication.

This guide does not replace veterinary diagnosis, treatment advice, or professional veterinary care.  
Always read and follow current product labels and seek veterinary guidance where appropriate.

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# KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DEALING WITH

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**Symptoms • Risk Factors • When to Treat • When not to Treat**

Not every symptom means worms.  
Understanding the signs helps you decide with confidence.

## Understanding Chicken Worms

If you're new to chickens—or even if you've had them for many years—the topic of worms, how to prevent them, and how to treat them can feel completely overwhelming.

Almost everyone seems to be an expert, and it can be difficult to work out what advice is actually right for your flock.

When it comes to worms that can impact your chooks, there are several different species that can cause health issues, and they each have different life cycles, methods of transmission, and effects on your birds.

Having a basic understanding of how to recognise when something may be wrong, whether worms are actually the problem, which species may be involved, and how treatment options differ can make managing your flock feel far more manageable.

This guide is designed to help you better understand internal parasites in backyard chickens so you can make informed decisions about monitoring, testing, treatment, and long-term flock health.

### So why do worms affect chickens?

Worms (and we don't mean your friendly, garden-variety earthworm!) are parasites. Being a parasite means they benefit from living inside your chickens while taking valuable nutrition away from their host.

This is why treating them correctly is important. Too many worms can create a terrible burden on your chickens — hence the term “worm burden” — and take a large toll on their health.

Parasites are Mother Nature's population control assistants. This worked well when chickens lived as wild junglefowl, free-ranging over vast areas of space. With domestication and limited free-range areas, however, there is a higher risk of internal parasites.

That may work in the wild, but with our backyard chickens, the goal is usually the opposite — reducing parasite pressure and keeping our birds healthy and thriving.

So how do you know when worms may actually be becoming a problem?

## **How can I tell if my chicken has worms?**

Many well-meaning chicken owners assume that because there are no visible worms in their chickens' droppings, they must not have any worms at all.

This isn't necessarily true. By the time worms are visible in droppings, the worm burden is often already very high and may make the affected chicken visibly sick.

Chickens affected by worms may show a range of behavioural and physical changes. However, many of these signs can also be associated

with other illnesses, stress, moulting, nutritional issues, environmental conditions, or general flock management factors.

Symptoms alone do not confirm a worm burden, but they may indicate that further investigation is needed. A sick chicken may show one or any combination of the following symptoms or behaviours:

- Isolating themselves or keeping separate from the flock
- Ruffled or fluffed-up feathers
- Tail held down
- Hunched-up posture
- Listless appearance and/or reduced interest in surroundings
- Eyes closed or half-closed (often mistaken for sleeping)
- Spending more time sitting than up and scratching around
- Reduced self-care, such as less dust bathing or grooming
- Pale comb and/or wattles
- Diarrhoea and/or dirty vent or bottom feathers
- Slow growth in young birds
- Reduced egg production in older birds

A quick Google search, or five minutes in a poultry Facebook group, can make almost any symptom sound catastrophic. Use the above symptom list as a starting point, not a diagnosis.

Observe your flock, look at the whole picture, and avoid assuming worms are automatically the culprit without investigating further.

If symptoms alone don't tell the full story, the next question becomes when treatment is actually appropriate.

## When should I start treating for worms? What if I have chicks or young pullets?

It is very important not to worm your chickens just because you 'should' or out of fear they may get (or have) worms. It is particularly important not to worm them too much.

Repeated or inappropriate use of worming products may contribute to reduced effectiveness over time, and this is something we want to avoid wherever possible.

Instead of treating automatically, consider whether monitoring, testing, or worming may be appropriate based on your flock's circumstances, age, previous exposure, and overall level of risk.

Some situations where monitoring, testing, or worming may require a little more thought include:

- **Young birds:** Monitoring, testing, or worming may be considered from around 12 weeks of age, particularly once they have spent time on the ground and have had increased exposure to soil and the outdoor environment.
- **New additions:** Consider whether worming is appropriate before introducing new birds into your flock (check with the previous owner when they were last treated).
- **Outgoing birds:** Chickens that you have sold or are giving away to a new home may benefit from being wormed well before they leave.

These situations do not automatically mean treatment is required—they are simply points where monitoring, testing, or reassessment may become more valuable.

## **Treating for worms: A minimal intervention approach**

Worming your chickens routinely can be unnecessary in certain situations.

If there has been no previous history of poultry on the land that you are bringing chickens or fowl onto, it is entirely possible that there may be few or no worm eggs present in the soil. If you're unsure, you can always test for worm eggs first.

Before reaching for a wormer, try to identify whether worms are actually the problem you are solving.

Changes in droppings, behaviour, appetite, weight, or laying can happen for many reasons, and worms are only one possibility. Monitoring your flock, reviewing risk factors, and considering Faecal Egg Count (FEC) testing can help build a clearer picture before deciding whether treatment is actually needed.

Many people don't want to medicate their chickens unnecessarily if they don't have to. Others prefer to avoid unnecessary chemical residues in eggs, or may have food sensitivities within the household and prefer to take a more cautious approach.

While treating your flock for worms if they don't have any generally won't harm them, it's not ideal to use worming products unnecessarily, and there is always the potential for worms to become less responsive to treatment over time.

If this approach sounds more like you, Aussie Chook Supplies has [Worm Burden Testing Kits](#) available. Add one to your next order and we'll pop it in the box for you.

Testing can be a useful way to better understand what's happening in your flock before deciding whether treatment is necessary. Let's take a closer look at how FEC testing works.

## **What is an Faecal Egg Count (FEC)?**

An FEC is a laboratory test that examines your chickens' droppings under a microscope to look for and count parasite eggs.<sup>6</sup> It helps identify whether common internal parasites may be present and provides an indication of the level of parasite contamination being shed into the environment.<sup>3</sup>

For routine flock screening, it is generally recommended to collect a pooled sample.<sup>5</sup> A pooled sample involves combining small amounts of fresh droppings collected from different locations throughout the flock area, ideally from different birds where possible, into a single submission.<sup>5</sup> This provides an overall indication of flock worm burden rather than assessing an individual bird.

**Worm Burden Testing Kits** can be ordered as a standalone purchase or added to an existing order. Each kit contains the materials and instructions needed to collect and submit your sample correctly. Sample collection kits are provided at no charge, with customers only paying return postage and the laboratory testing fee directly to Parasite Diagnostics.

Collection is simple:

- Collect fresh droppings only (avoid old, dried, or contaminated samples).<sup>5</sup>
- Follow the kit instructions for sample quantity and packaging
- Complete the submission details provided
- Post directly to Parasite Diagnostics for assessment

It's important to understand that an egg count does not equal adult worm burden.<sup>3</sup> Some worm species produce large numbers of eggs, others produce fewer, and some parasites may not be shedding eggs at the time of collection.<sup>4</sup> Immature worms may also not appear in results.<sup>2</sup>

A negative FEC does not completely rule out parasites, and results should always be interpreted alongside symptoms, flock history, and environmental conditions.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, finding parasite eggs does not automatically mean treatment is required.<sup>8</sup> Low levels of parasite activity may not always result in illness or justify immediate worming.

## A real-flock example:

One poultry breeder raised all his chicks in brooders before introducing them to the ground. As the ground was completely new to chickens and fowl, he had his chickens tested for worms by sending samples of his flock's droppings to an avian specialist vet.

The resulting report did not identify any evidence of parasite eggs at the time of testing. With no indication that treatment was required, he did not treat his flock for worms for more than six years.

As this example shows, submitting a simple sample can help guide treatment decisions —whether that means selecting products that target the worms identified or avoiding unnecessary worming altogether.

Once worm eggs become established in the environment, however, ongoing monitoring may become part of normal flock management. The goal is not necessarily to achieve zero worms, but rather to maintain healthy birds and avoid meaningful worm burdens.

Monitoring may sometimes lead to treatment—but not always. Understanding when worming may not be necessary is just as important as knowing when to treat.

## When should you NOT worm your chickens?

While worming is an important part of flock health management, more treatment does not always mean better outcomes.

You may wish to avoid routine worming if:

- There are no symptoms of illness or signs of worm burden in your flock.
- Recent FEC testing does not indicate treatment is currently required.
- Your birds have had limited exposure to soil, free-ranging, previous poultry use, or known parasite pressure.
- You are repeating treatment simply because a set period of time has passed rather than responding to symptoms, testing results, or known risk factors.

You should also avoid treating repeatedly without understanding why worms may be returning, as ongoing exposure from contaminated ground, environmental conditions, or flock management practices can continue the cycle.<sup>9</sup>

That said, choosing not to worm should still involve active monitoring. Keep an eye on flock condition, body weight, egg production, droppings, and any changes in behaviour.

If symptoms develop, environmental risks change, or testing suggests parasite activity, reassess the situation and decide whether treatment is appropriate.

The goal is not to never worm—it is to worm when there is a clear reason to do so.

One of the most useful ways to make that decision is to understand what increases parasite risk within your own flock and environment.

## **What increases the risk of worms in chickens?**

Not all flocks carry the same parasite risk.

Some backyards may have very little parasite pressure, while others may have conditions that make worm exposure much more likely. Understanding your flock's individual circumstances can help you decide when monitoring or testing may be more useful than automatically reaching for a wormer.

## **Environmental factors that may increase worm exposure**

- Birds spending significant time on soil, grass, or free-range areas
- Wet, muddy, or poorly drained runs
- Areas with heavy shade that remain damp for long periods
- Deep litter systems that are not cleaned or refreshed regularly
- High stocking density or limited rotation of outdoor areas
- Previous history of poultry, waterfowl, or game birds on the same ground
- Large numbers of slugs, snails, insects, or earthworms (which can act as intermediate hosts for some parasites).<sup>10</sup>

## Flock factors that may warrant closer monitoring

Flock characteristics and recent events can also provide useful clues about when closer observation, monitoring, or testing may be worthwhile.

- Introducing new birds without quarantine or monitoring
- Mixed-age flocks where younger birds may have lower immunity
- Birds recovering from illness, moulting, or other periods of stress
- Frequent attendance at poultry shows, swaps, or movement between properties
- A known previous history of worm burden within the flock
- Changes in body condition, laying performance, or droppings

Having one or more of these factors does not automatically mean your chickens have worms. Instead, think of them as signs to increase monitoring, review flock management practices, and consider FEC testing if concerns arise.

Understanding how worms move through the environment can also help reduce future exposure.<sup>11</sup> Most internal parasites rely on birds repeatedly encountering infective stages through soil, droppings, insects, intermediate hosts, or contaminated areas.<sup>11</sup>

Improving drainage, reducing overcrowding, refreshing litter, rotating access areas where practical, and reducing manure build-up may help reduce reinfection pressure over time.<sup>12</sup> Moving birds onto fresh ground can also be useful where possible.<sup>12</sup>

However, movement alone does not automatically prevent worm exposure and should be considered alongside flock size, weather conditions, environmental factors, and practical flock management.

The goal is not to eliminate every single worm from the environment—it is to reduce the opportunity for the cycle to continue.

While understanding environmental risk can help reduce exposure, it's equally important to recognise what a possible worm problem can actually look like in your flock. Not every bird with worms looks obviously sick and not every sick-looking bird necessarily has worms.

## Recognising worm burden

When investigating flock health, look out for these indicators:

- Lack of appetite, disinterest in food/treats, OR eating much more than usual.
- Weight loss (hard to tell unless you actually pick the bird up and feel around the breastbone and thighs).
- Obvious signs in their droppings, such as whole worms or segments.



Most of the signs listed above are fairly broad. They can tell you if a chicken is under the weather, but they don't definitively indicate that the cause of your chicken's illness is a worm burden.

Your chicken could have something else going on as well as, or instead of, worms. The illustration on the previous page demonstrates some of these characteristics, including isolating from the main flock.

If worms are suspected, the next step is understanding what you may actually be dealing with.

# COMMON WORMS IN CHICKENS

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**Roundworms • Tapeworms • Hairworms • Caecal Worms**

Different worms behave differently.  
Understanding the life cycle helps make better decisions.

## What do worms look like?

One of the most common misconceptions in backyard poultry keeping is that worms will always be obvious in droppings. In reality, many internal parasites may not be visible at all, can shed intermittently, or may only become noticeable once a parasite burden becomes more significant.

Different worm species also vary greatly in size, appearance, location within the bird, and the type of health issues they may cause. Some are large enough to be seen with the naked eye, while others can be extremely fine or difficult to detect without testing.

Understanding the differences between the major worm species commonly discussed in chickens can help make parasite management, testing, treatment decisions, and symptom interpretation far less confusing.

The following sections introduce the worm species most commonly discussed in backyard poultry and explain how they spread, where they live within the bird, and why understanding their life cycles can make parasite management much easier.

## Large roundworms — *Ascaridia galli*

Large Roundworms (*Ascaridia galli*) are among the most common internal parasites found in backyard chickens and are one of the easiest worm species for flock owners to recognise.<sup>13</sup>

Adult worms live within the intestinal tract and, in heavier infestations, may occasionally be visible in droppings.<sup>13</sup>

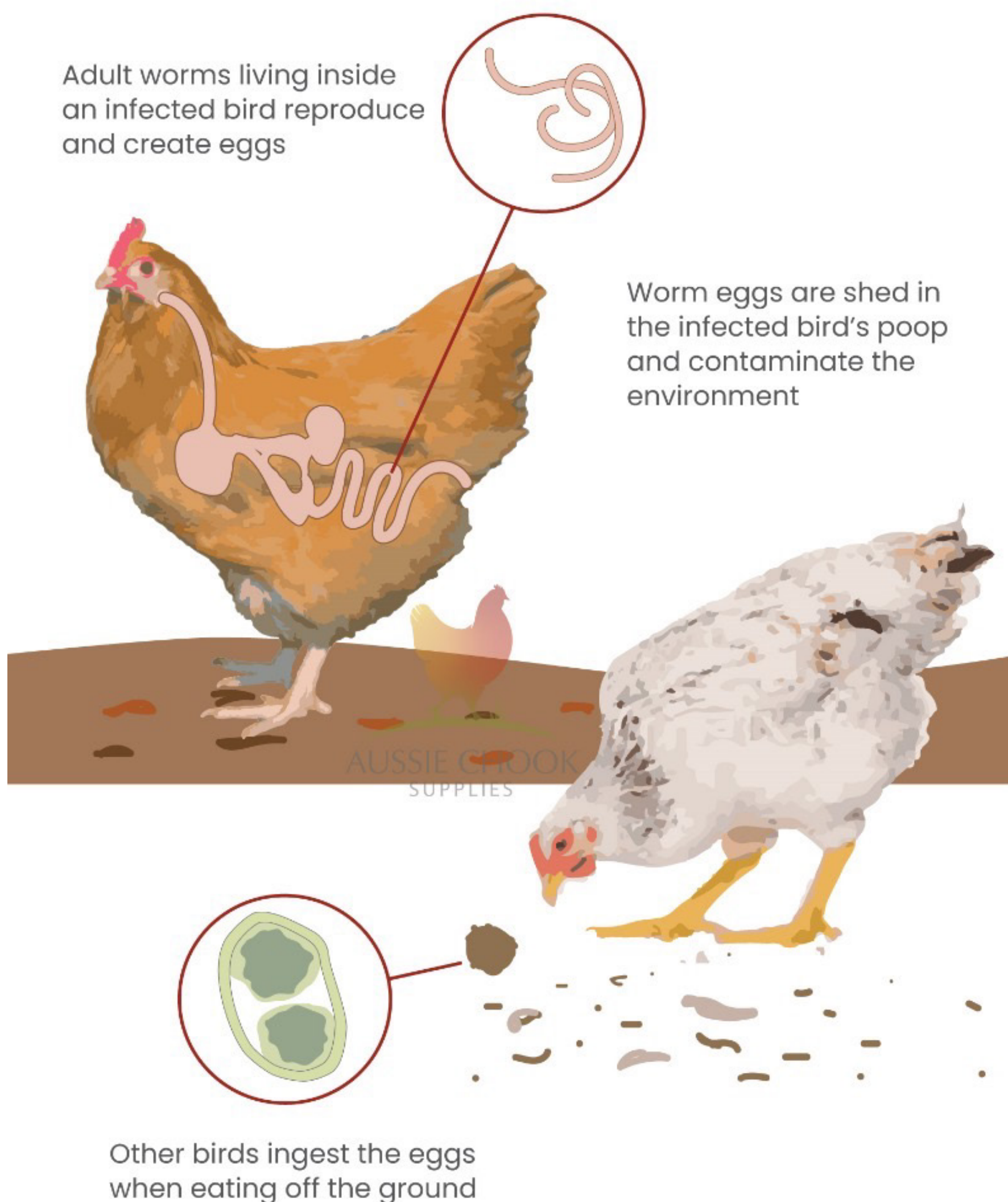
They are typically white to cream in colour and often resemble short strands of spaghetti.

Large numbers within the intestinal tract can lead to blockages and significantly affect the health of your chickens.<sup>14</sup>

They're also really gross!

## Large Roundworm Life Cycle

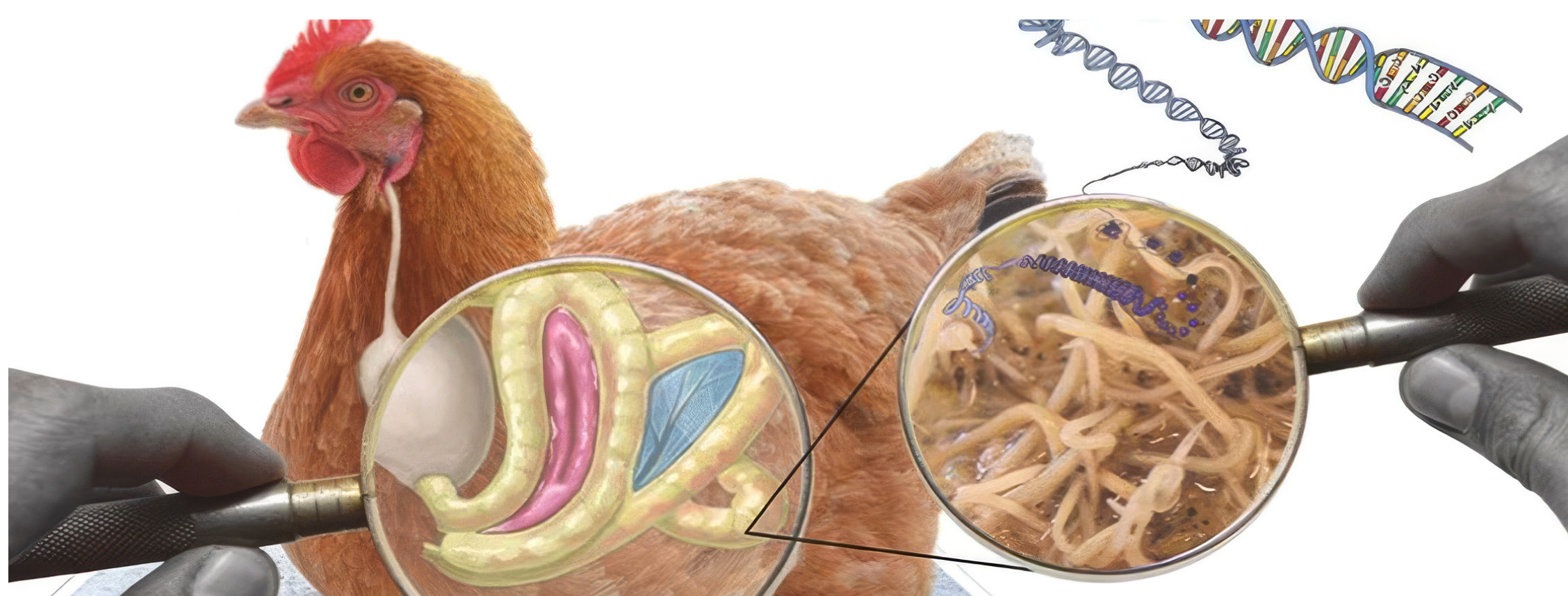
*Ascaridia galli*



Large roundworms spread between chickens through eggs shed in droppings and are more commonly transmitted when birds are kept in confined areas that are not cleaned regularly.<sup>14</sup>

Roundworm eggs can survive in soil, coop runs, and garden areas for extended periods.<sup>15</sup> Infected birds pass eggs in their droppings, which are then easily picked up by other birds while scratching and foraging.<sup>15</sup>

They can also persist in deep litter systems, making good environmental management an important way to reduce exposure.<sup>15</sup>



Roundworms in the small intestine of an affected chicken

Images courtesy of Dr Jean Sander, MSD Veterinary Manual & sciencedirect.com

Note: If you are finding worms on the outer shell—or inside an egg once cracked—it may indicate a heavy worm burden and should prompt investigation and treatment.



Roundworm on egg shell - Image courtesy of Emma McCormack

## Tapeworms — *Cestodes spp.*

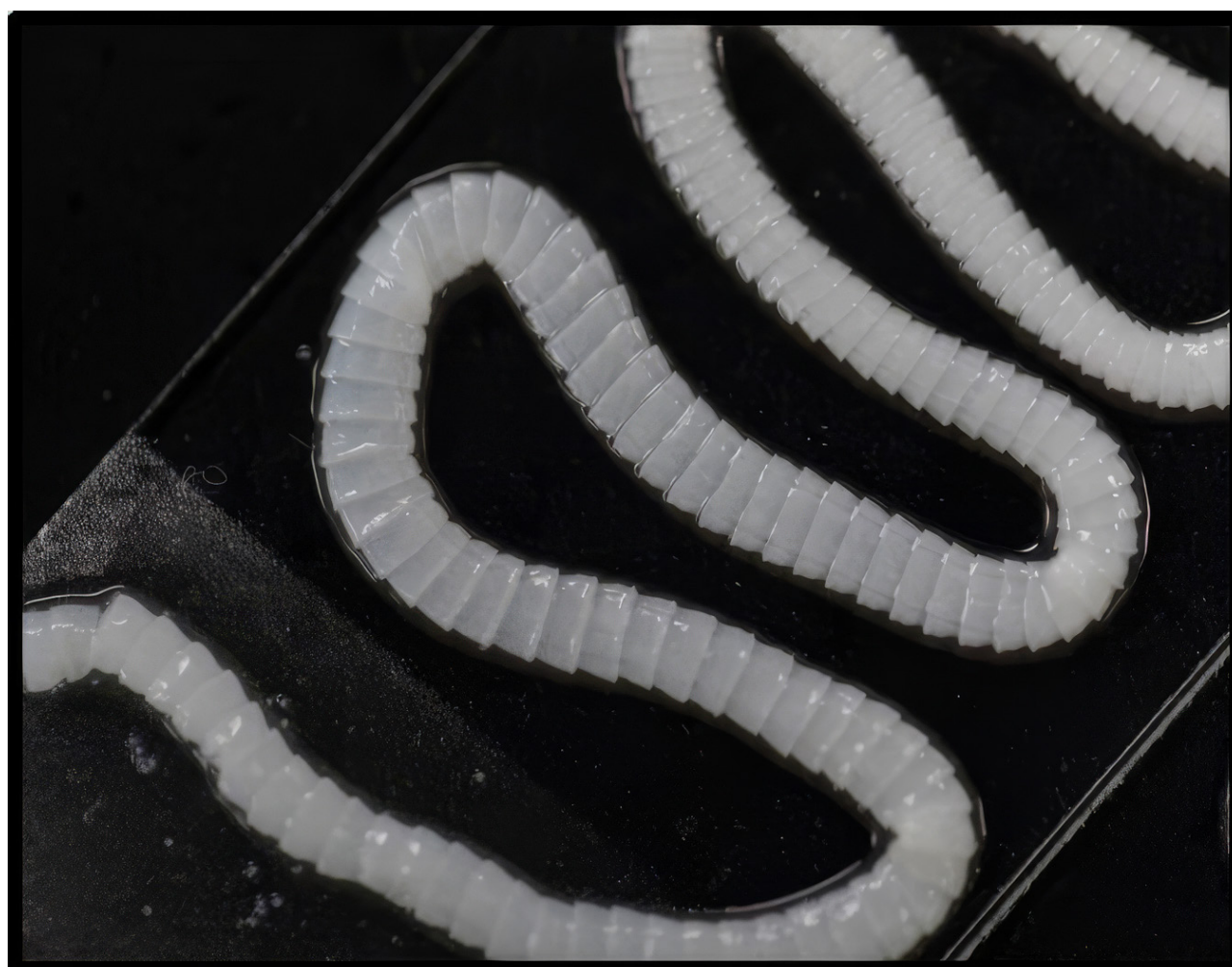
Tapeworms are flat and segmented and attach themselves to the chicken's small intestine using specialised mouthparts.<sup>16</sup> As they grow, they continually add new body segments, some of which contain eggs as reproduction occurs.<sup>16</sup> These segments eventually detach and are passed out in the droppings, where they may appear as small white particles resembling grains of rice.<sup>16</sup>

Once shed into the environment, these segments (and therefore the eggs they contain) are eaten by slugs, snails, and other insects, which are then consumed by chickens and continue the cycle.<sup>17</sup> Inside the bird, developing tapeworms absorb nutrients from food within the intestine that would otherwise support the chicken's health and

condition.<sup>17</sup> If left unmanaged, larger numbers may contribute to poor condition and more significant health issues over time.<sup>17</sup>

Younger chickens are more prone to tapeworms and the internal damage they can cause, whereas older chickens can build up more resistance over time.<sup>18</sup>

While there are thousands of tapeworm species worldwide, only a small number are considered relevant to backyard poultry.<sup>18</sup>

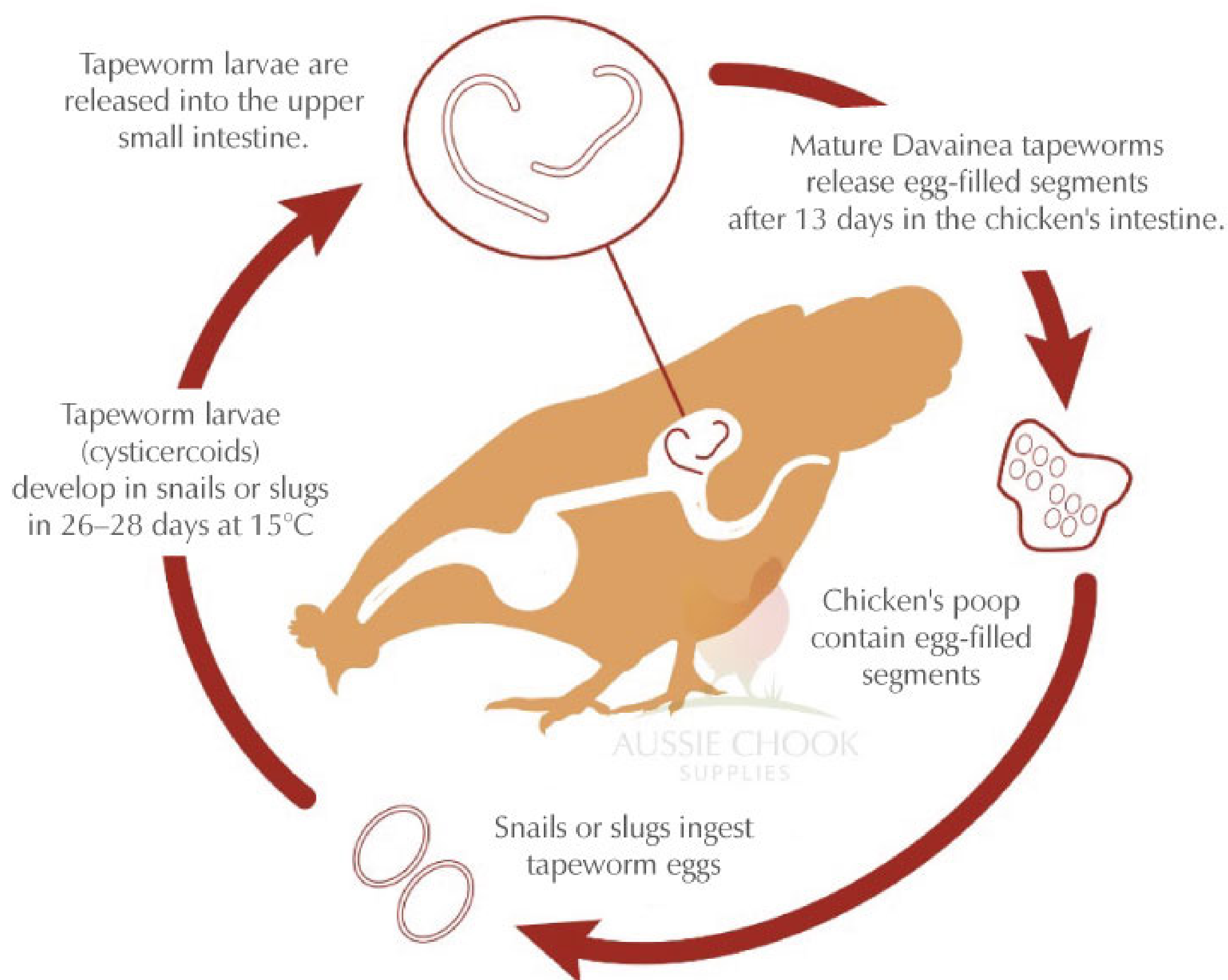


Artwork Left: Tapeworm in its entirety

Artwork Right: Tapeworm segments in fresh chicken poop - Image courtesy of Julia Foster

## Tapeworm Life Cycle

*Davainea proglottina*



## Hairworms — *Capillaria spp.*

Hairworms (also called threadworms) are thin, hair-like worms that are only a few centimetres long (and many are even shorter).<sup>19</sup>

Hairworms feed on different parts of the chicken depending on the species involved and may affect areas including the crop, oesophagus, small intestine, and bowel.<sup>19</sup> When present in large numbers, they can cause significant damage and may become fatal, making early identification, treatment and—better still—prevention particularly important.<sup>19</sup>

Like tapeworms, some hairworm species rely on an intermediate host as part of their life cycle before eventually being ingested by chickens.<sup>20</sup> Their tiny, microscopic eggs are passed out in the droppings and can then be taken up by earthworms, which are later eaten by foraging birds and continue the cycle.<sup>20</sup>

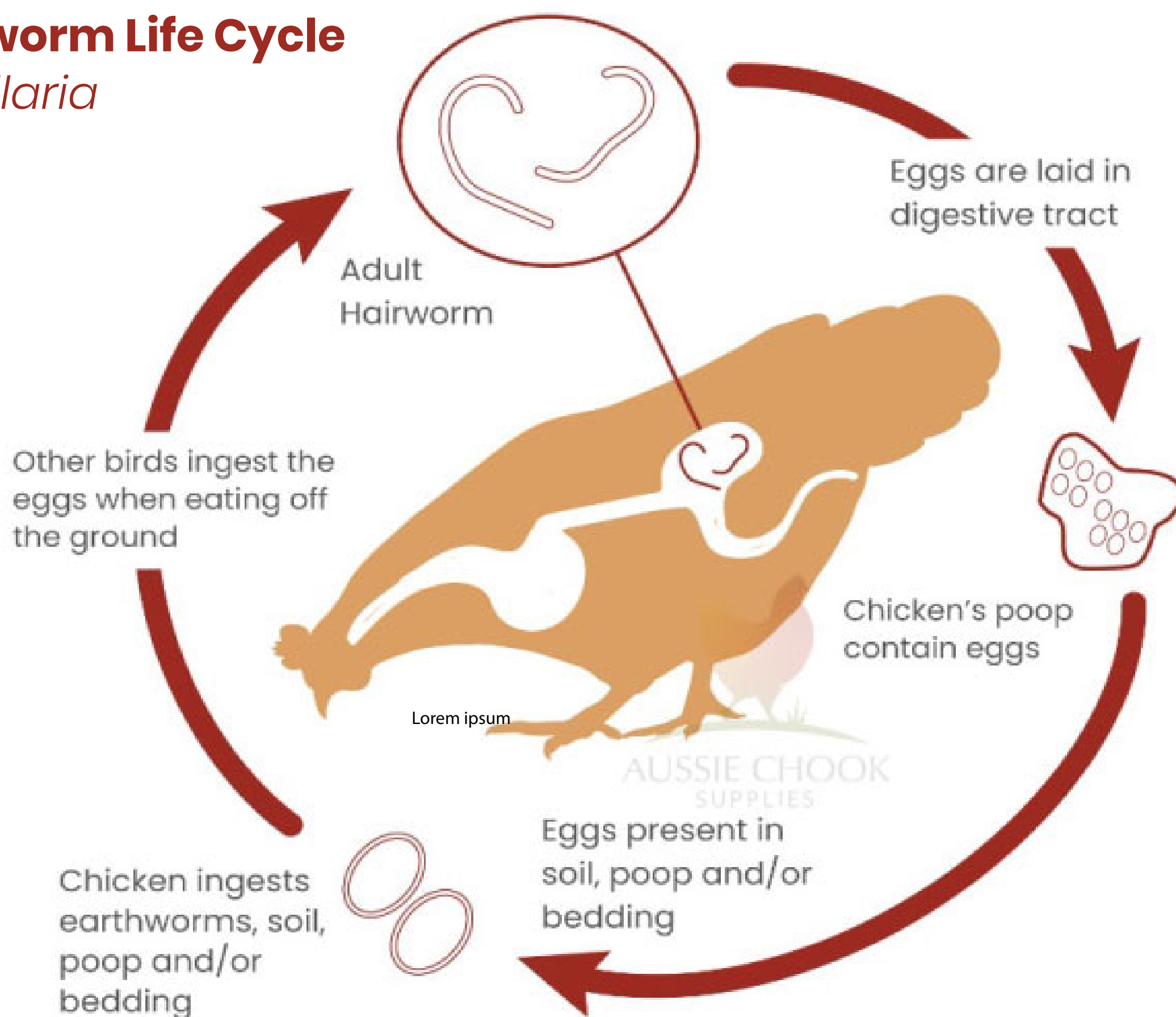
Unlike some of the larger worm species, even adult hairworms are generally not visible to the naked eye as they burrow into the tissues of the digestive tract.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, a droppings sample analysed under a microscope is often the most useful way to support diagnosis.<sup>21</sup>



Hairworms as seen under a microscope

## Hairworm Life Cycle

### *Capillaria*



## Caecal worms — *Heterakis gallinarum*

Caecal (cecal) worms live in the caecum, which is the lower bowel located just before the colon.<sup>22</sup>

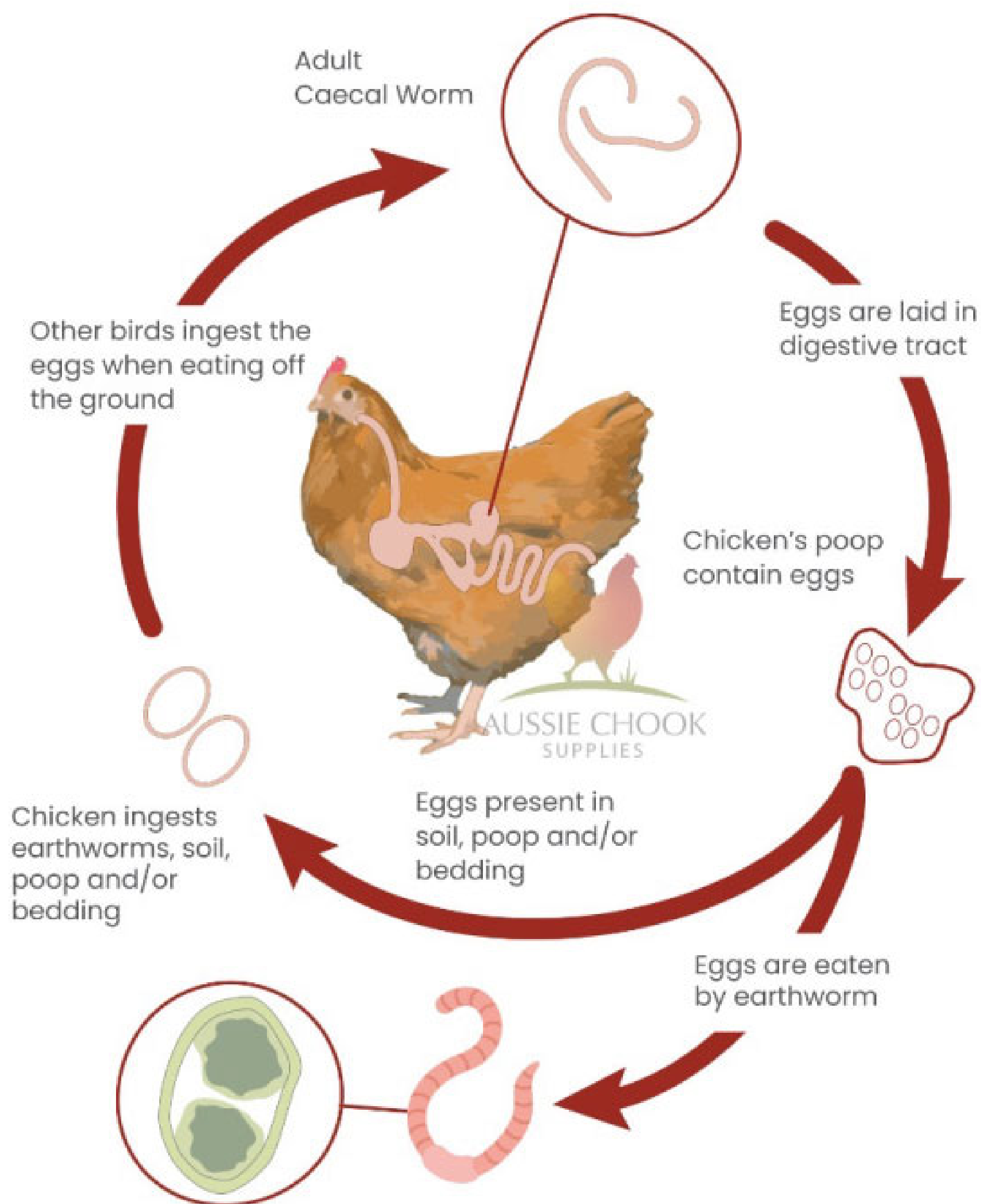
One of the more important things to understand about caecal worms is that they can carry *Histomonas meleagridis*, the parasite responsible for causing Blackhead disease, which is highly harmful to turkeys.<sup>22</sup> For this reason, care should be taken if chickens and turkeys are kept together (which is generally not recommended).

Adult worms produce eggs that are passed out in the droppings and picked up by other chickens, continuing the cycle.<sup>23</sup> After ingestion, larvae hatch in the upper intestine before eventually moving through to the caecum where they mature.<sup>23</sup>

Blackhead disease can persist in the environment, and allowing ground to rest before introducing turkeys may sometimes be recommended after chickens have occupied the area.<sup>23</sup>

## Caecal Worm Life Cycle

*Heterakis gallinarum*



# MAKE A PLAN

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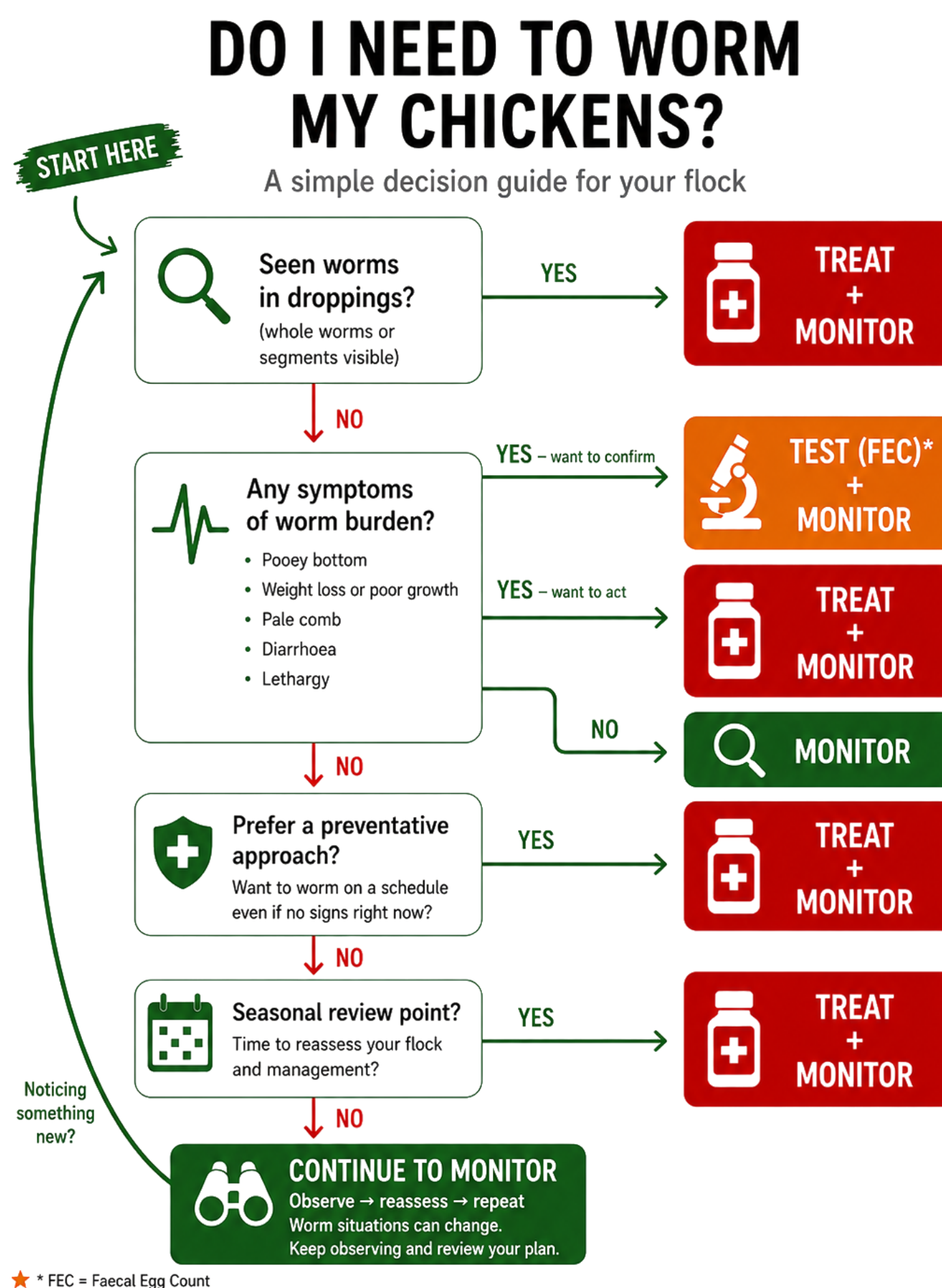
## **Decision-Making • Monitoring • Natural Treatments Worming Frequency**

The goal isn't zero worms.  
The goal is healthy birds and informed decisions.

## Making a decision

By now, you've seen that not every symptom means worms and not every flock requires immediate treatment.

Use the guide below to work through symptoms, monitoring, testing, treatment, and environmental management before deciding what to do next.





## TREAT

- Identify the worm type (if possible)
- Choose a product/treatment course that suits your flock
- Follow label directions carefully
- Complete treatment as directed



## TEST (FEC)

- Collect fresh droppings
- Follow collection instructions
- Send sample for testing
- Review the results
- Decide if treatment is needed



## MONITOR

- Observe your flock regularly
- Watch for changes in droppings or behaviour
- Reassess if something changes
- Test or treat as needed



## MAINTAIN ENVIRONMENT

- Keep coop/run bedding dry
- Clean feeders & waterers regularly
- Improve drainage & reduce muddy areas
- Rotate free ranging areas (where possible)

The decision guide provides a simple framework to help you decide what to do next. One step that people often find the hardest is knowing when to simply monitor—so let's look at what that actually means in practice.

## What does monitoring actually mean?

Monitoring is less about searching for worms every day and more about noticing changes from what is normal for your flock.

Things to monitor include:

- Body condition and weight changes (pick birds up regularly—don't rely on appearance alone).
- Egg production and egg quality.
- Appetite and interest in food.
- Droppings (including consistency, colour, and any visible abnormalities).
- Behaviour changes such as isolation, reduced activity, or less foraging.
- Feather condition and overall appearance.
- Environmental conditions including mud, drainage, stocking density, and cleanliness.
- New bird introductions, flock stress, or recent illness.

In practice, monitoring often means continuing normal flock management while staying alert to changes over time. If symptoms appear, risk factors increase, or concerns develop, return to the decision guide and consider whether testing, treatment, or environmental changes may be appropriate.

The goal of monitoring isn't to catch every single worm—it's to identify meaningful changes early and make better decisions for your flock.

Once you've decided that action may be needed, the next question becomes what approach you want to take.

## **Natural treatments: what to use and what actually works?**

This is a hot topic within the poultry-keeping community. A quick search of Facebook groups or poultry forums for "natural" and "worming" will reveal years of debate, often with passionate opinions on both sides.

Some of the natural products commonly recommended for parasite control include pumpkin seeds, turmeric, chilli, garlic, apple cider vinegar (ACV), diatomaceous earth (DE), and papaya.

So where do things like pumpkin seeds fit into parasite control? Pumpkin seeds are believed to contain cucurbitacin, which has been used in worm and parasite management with livestock for generations. There is considerable debate about how much would need to be consumed by chickens for this to be truly effective, and just as much discussion around whether very large amounts may create unintended issues. Ultimately, consider the available evidence and decide what feels right for you and your flock.

ACV is a useful product to add to drinkers and waterers and may assist with reducing algae and mosquito larvae under some conditions; however, at this stage, there is little evidence to suggest it performs well for internal parasite control.

The one critical warning we will give concerns the use of internal DE for your flock. There is a lot of information and debate around its effectiveness as an external treatment for poultry parasites such as lice and mites. Regardless of how effective it may or may not be externally, once DE becomes wet, any potential effect from the diatoms (which rely on microscopic sharp edges when completely dry) is largely lost. Put simply, once it's wet, it doesn't work.

The success of the natural “treatments” listed above has not been scientifically proven, and while we don’t encourage their use as a primary parasite treatment, your chickens certainly won’t be disappointed with extra treats like pumpkin seeds and papaya.

As research continues to evolve, natural approaches may warrant reconsideration where good-quality evidence demonstrates meaningful effectiveness.

At the end of the day, if you've considered the available evidence, want to try some of these methods, and feel they benefit your flock, we aren’t going to argue with you. You need to do what you believe is in the best interest of your chickens.

Whether you prefer a conventional approach, a natural approach, or somewhere in between, timing and decision-making still matter.

## How often should I treat my chickens for worms?

The changing seasons provide a useful reminder to review your flock management rather than automatically deciding treatment is needed.

Seasonal changes influence environmental conditions that affect parasite exposure, including moisture, temperature, free-ranging behaviour, and ground contamination. As these conditions change throughout the year, so too can the likelihood of your birds encountering parasite eggs or intermediate hosts.

For this reason, each change of season can provide a useful checkpoint to monitor your flock, review any symptoms, consider current risk factors, and decide whether testing or treatment is appropriate.

For some flocks, this may mean treatment is appropriate. For others, monitoring or FEC testing may indicate there is no need to worm at that time.

There is no universal schedule that suits every flock—and that's because no two chicken keepers are managing exactly the same conditions. The right timing depends on your birds, your environment, and what your monitoring or testing is telling you.

Once you've decided treatment is appropriate, the next question becomes how to administer it effectively.

# CHOOSING A TREATMENT

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**Flubendazole • Levamisole • Piperazine • Praziquantel**

Different treatments work in different ways.  
Understanding each active ingredient helps you choose with confidence.

## What method should I use to treat worms? Is treating through drinking water the most effective?

Regardless of what type or brand of wormer you plan to use, the most common methods of administering wormers are direct oral dosing (via tablet or gel), addition to drinking water, or mixing into food.<sup>24</sup> There is no single 'best' method—the right approach depends on the product, your flock size, and how confidently you can ensure each bird receives an appropriate dose.<sup>24</sup>

If you have a small backyard flock, individually dosing birds with tablets or gel can often be the easiest way to know exactly what each chook has received. The best time to do this is usually after dark, when your flock is settled on the perch (please note: some wormers require an empty crop or stomach, so you may need to fast your birds beforehand as directed).

Pop into the coop after dark, gently place your hands around both wings to avoid flapping or noise that may disturb the others, and remove the individual bird from the perch. Support the bird comfortably and administer the treatment directly into the beak as directed on the packaging, allowing plenty of time to swallow safely before quietly returning them back to bed.

For larger flocks, treating through drinking water or feed is often a more practical option. If using a water-based treatment, make sure there are no alternative water sources available during the treatment window (such as muddy puddles or open containers).

Ideally, remove untreated drinking water in the late afternoon the day before treatment so birds are keen to drink normally the following morning when treated water is introduced.

The treated water should remain available long enough for normal flock consumption and to improve the likelihood that all birds receive an adequate dose.

Getting the dose right matters.<sup>25</sup> Underdosing can significantly reduce treatment effectiveness and may allow more resilient worms to survive, while overdosing isn't ideal either—more product does not automatically mean better results.<sup>25</sup> Water treatments rely entirely on birds consuming enough treated water during the treatment period, and factors such as flock hierarchy, weather, illness, stress, and individual drinking behaviour can all influence intake.<sup>25</sup>

Follow label directions carefully and choose the method that best suits your flock and setup.

If enough people consistently dose below recommended rates, there is a real risk that worming products become less effective over time which benefits nobody—except perhaps the worms.

**Aussie Chook Supplies Top Tip:** If your chickens don't like the taste of the worming medication in their water, adding a splash of raspberry cordial (or similar) may help disguise the bitter taste of the active ingredients and encourage normal drinking. Make it a bit stronger than you'd usually make a jug for the kids after school.

The goal is to override the taste of the treatment, not win any parenting awards.

Before choosing a product, it's also important to understand how environmental conditions can affect certain treatment methods—particularly water-based medications.

## **Why is administering worming medication through water not recommended during hot weather?**

There are two main reasons water-based worming treatments are generally not recommended during hot weather.<sup>26</sup>

Chickens can be surprisingly sensitive to the bitter taste of some active ingredients (although why that is, we have no idea—they are perfectly happy drinking from muddy puddles!). If birds refuse the treated water on a hot day, dehydration can occur quickly and may become a serious welfare issue.<sup>26</sup>

There is also an increased risk of overconsumption. Chickens naturally increase their water intake in hot weather to help regulate body temperature, which may result in them consuming significantly more of the active ingredient than intended and potentially receiving an excessive dose.<sup>26</sup>

The opposite concern can apply during very cold weather. If birds reduce their water intake, they may not consume enough medication to receive an adequate therapeutic dose.<sup>26</sup>

Choosing the right method of administration is only one part of effective worm control. The active ingredient is equally important, as it determines which worms a product targets and where it may be most appropriate to use.

## **What can I use to worm my chickens, and how do I know it's effective?**

A range of products is available for poultry parasite control, with different products suited to different flock situations.

In the following sections, products are grouped by active ingredient to make comparisons easier. We'll look at which worm species each active ingredient targets, along with the practical considerations that may influence when it's the right choice.

Throughout this section, we refer to a selection of products stocked by Aussie Chook Supplies and other commonly available wormers to help explain how different active ingredients are used in practice.

This guide is not intended to be a comprehensive list of every poultry worming product available in Australia.

# Active ingredient overview

## Active ingredient: Flubendazole



Elanco Flubenol • Vella Stockfeeds Chicken Wormer MP  
Laucke Red Hen Dewormer • Vetsense Fluverm

## Overview:

Flubendazole works directly to control major gastrointestinal worms in poultry, including gapeworm, large roundworms, small roundworms, hairworms affecting the crop and small intestine, and tapeworms.<sup>27</sup> It works by disrupting processes that worms rely on to maintain and reproduce their cells, ultimately leading to their death.<sup>27</sup>

In practical terms, Flubendazole can suit backyard flocks where broad worm coverage and no egg withholding are priorities—provided you can commit to managing feed properly for the duration of treatment. It has been approved for poultry use since the 1980s and has a long history of use within the industry.<sup>27</sup>

## **Treatment course:**

Flubendazole is not a single-dose medication. It must be fed continuously over a 5–7 day treatment period to improve effectiveness across different stages of the parasite life cycle.<sup>28</sup>

Only a small amount is required and is mixed into the birds' daily feed. The main catch is that their humans (that's you!) need to resist giving ANY scratch mix, greens, treats, or extra snacks during the full treatment period—no matter how much they beg, stare, complain, or act like they've never been fed before—so they consume the intended amount of medicated feed relative to body weight.

Flubendazole has been a major development for backyard poultry keepers in Australia because it has a genuine NIL withholding period for meat and eggs. It also does not affect flock fertility or hatchability.<sup>28</sup>

## Pros:

- Easily mixed into existing poultry feed, resulting in minimal food refusal.
- Excellent stability with a two-year expiry period from date of manufacture.
- [Red Hen Dewormer](#) or Vella Chicken Wormer MP both provide economical pre-blended options—simply feed and go.

## Cons & limitations:

- Requires strict feed management; alternative forage or treats reduce dosing accuracy.
- Tubs of [Flubenol](#) & [Fluvern](#) worming powder can be larger and more expensive than ready mixed chicken food compared to what the average backyard flock owner requires.

## Good fit for:

Backyard flocks where avoiding an egg withholding period and achieving broad-spectrum parasite protection are the primary concerns.

## Active ingredient: Levamisole



### Vetfarm Wormout Solution

Bainbridge Poultry Wormer • [Vetsense Kilverm](#) • [Allfarm Levamisole](#)

## Overview:

Levamisole has been around since the 1960s and has had several fascinating uses over the years, including historical use in human medicine (including colon cancer treatment).

When used as an animal parasite treatment, Levamisole targets the worms' neuromuscular system, paralysing them and preventing them from remaining attached, feeding, and reproducing normally.<sup>29</sup>

In practical terms, Levamisole can be a useful option for larger flocks where water administration suits your setup—but treatment success

relies heavily on birds actually consuming the intended amount. Once affected, the worms lose their ability to remain established and are eventually passed out by the bird.<sup>29</sup>

Levamisole is highly effective against threadworms and large roundworms but has no activity against tapeworms.<sup>29</sup>

## Pros:

- Incredibly straightforward to measure and administer through volume-based drinking water treatment.
- Reliably treats large roundworms (*Ascaridia galli*), caecal worms (*Heterakis gallinarum*), and hairworms (*Capillaria spp.*).<sup>30</sup>
- Features a registered NIL egg withholding period under Australian standards.<sup>30</sup>

## Cons & limitations:

- It can be difficult to calculate exactly how much medication each bird consumes, meaning flock water intake still needs to be monitored carefully.
- Ineffective against tapeworm populations.<sup>30</sup>

## Good fit for:

Larger flocks where administering medication via a shared water supply is significantly more practical than handling birds individually. for meat and eggs, and flock fertility and hatchability are not affected.<sup>28</sup>

## Active ingredient: Piperazine



Pharmachem Piperazine Solution  
INCA Piperazine Solution • [Allfarm Piperazine](#)

## Overview:

Piperazine was introduced for veterinary use in the 1950s and is used in poultry primarily for the treatment of certain roundworm infections. It works by causing flaccid paralysis of susceptible worms, allowing them to be expelled through normal intestinal movement.<sup>31</sup>

As Piperazine has a relatively narrow spectrum of activity, it is generally used when susceptible roundworms are the primary concern rather

than when broad parasite coverage is required.<sup>31</sup> Under current Australian registrations, Piperazine-based products do not require an egg withholding period.<sup>31</sup>

Piperazine products are available in a range of formulations. Availability, approved uses, and administration instructions may vary between products and jurisdictions, so always follow current label directions.

## Pros:

- Generally easy to administer.
- Targets large roundworms effectively when used as directed.
- No egg withholding period under current Australian registrations.

## Cons & limitations:

- Narrower parasite coverage—primarily targeting large roundworms (*Ascaridia galli*) at standard doses, with significantly higher and more targeted dosing required to affect *Capillaria* or *Heterakis* species.<sup>32</sup>
- Not ideal where broad-spectrum parasite control is required.<sup>32</sup>

## Good fit for:

Backyard keepers seeking a targeted treatment where common large roundworms are the primary concern.<sup>32</sup>

## Active ingredient: Praziquante



Avitrol Plus Bird Wormer tablets

Vetafarm Pigeon & Bantam Wormout tablets • Avitrol Plus Bird Wormer Syrup

## Overview:

Praziquantel (usually combined with Levamisole) is widely regarded as one of the most effective options available for treating tapeworms and has been used in both human and veterinary medicine since the 1970s.<sup>33</sup> It works by disrupting the parasite's normal muscle function, causing paralysis so the worm detaches and is either passed naturally or broken down within the digestive tract.<sup>33</sup>

For backyard chicken keepers, Praziquantel products are often attractive because they provide broad parasite coverage while

allowing accurate individual dosing.<sup>33</sup> However, discussions around withholding statements and label restrictions are often the point where flock owners pause and decide what feels appropriate for their household and flock management approach.

## The Label Reality

On [Avitrol Plus](#) packaging the label states clearly : **“Not to be used in food producing species.”**

On [Wormout tablets](#), the label states: **“NOT TO BE USED on birds intended for human consumption.”**

(This emphasis is taken directly from the manufacturer's packaging and has not been added by us.)

# UNDERSTANDING LABELS & WITHHOLDING PERIODS

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**Label Reality • Withholding Periods • Off-Label Use  
Practical Decisions**

Labels and withholding periods often cause confusion.  
Understanding both helps you decide with confidence.

# Understanding withholding periods

One of the most confusing areas for many backyard chicken keepers is understanding withholding periods, egg restrictions, and the different label statements found on poultry medications.

Some products are registered specifically for use in chickens and carry approved withholding periods for eggs and meat. Others may contain active ingredients used in other livestock species but are not registered for use in laying hens producing eggs for human consumption.<sup>36</sup>

This difference often causes confusion—particularly when flock owners hear products discussed online, recommended by other keepers, or mentioned in veterinary conversations despite strict label wording.

In simple terms, a withholding period is the minimum amount of time that must pass between treatment and the collection of eggs or meat intended for human consumption.

These withholding periods are determined through residue studies and supporting data used during the Australian registration process.<sup>36</sup> The purpose is to establish how long it takes for residues of a medication to reduce to levels considered acceptable under regulatory standards.<sup>36</sup>

Where these studies have been completed and approved, products may carry specific withholding periods such as:

- “Do not consume eggs for 7 days after treatment”, or
- “Nil withholding period”

However, where sufficient residue studies have not been completed for a particular species, production system (such as laying hens or meat birds), or treatment use, the product may instead carry much stricter label wording.

This does not automatically mean treated eggs are unsafe. It means the formal residue studies and supporting data required to establish an approved withholding period under Australian registration conditions have not been generated.<sup>36</sup>

To manage this uncertainty and meet legal requirements, manufacturers apply conservative label statements, including warnings that eggs or meat from treated birds should not be consumed.

This is one of the reasons different products can carry dramatically different label statements, even when they are discussed within the poultry community for similar purposes.

## The Praziquantel conundrum

Praziquantel is one of the most commonly discussed treatments for tapeworms in chickens.<sup>34</sup>

The challenge for many backyard keepers is that while praziquantel is widely recognised for tapeworm treatment in a range of animals, many products containing praziquantel are not specifically registered for use in laying hens producing eggs for human consumption in Australia.<sup>34</sup>

As a result, these products often carry strict label statements relating to egg consumption or use in food-producing animals.<sup>34</sup>

This can create confusion because flock owners may see:

- online discussions suggesting its use
- veterinary conversations involving praziquantel
- tapeworm treatment discussions where few alternative options exist

For many backyard flock owners, this is the point where they pause and decide what level of uncertainty and risk they feel comfortable managing for their own household and flock.

## Understanding off-label veterinary prescribing and use

In Australia, off-label use of veterinary products in food-producing animals requires consultation with a registered veterinarian.<sup>35</sup>

This process may involve:

- Assessment of the individual bird or flock<sup>35</sup>
- Discussion of symptoms, flock history, and treatment considerations<sup>35</sup>
- Discussion of potential treatment options, including appropriate medication selection<sup>35</sup>
- Consideration of withholding implications and food safety responsibilities associated with those treatment options<sup>35</sup>
- Veterinary assessment of whether a particular treatment approach is appropriate for that situation<sup>35</sup>
- Discussion with the flock owner about whether they are comfortable proceeding with that treatment option or would prefer an alternative approach<sup>35</sup>

Not all flock owners are comfortable using off-label medications in food-producing birds, even following veterinary consultation. Some may choose to proceed with a recommended treatment approach, while others may prefer to pursue alternative management or treatment options instead.

## **What happens in practical backyard management?**

That is the formal regulatory position. In practice, many backyard keepers make their own decisions about egg consumption following treatment.

Some flock owners choose to observe their own precautionary waiting period before consuming eggs—often 14 - 28 days—based on personal preference, veterinary advice, or community experience.

It is important to understand that these timeframes are individual risk-management decisions and are not official manufacturer recommendations or approved withholding periods.

Aussie Chook Supplies does not endorse off-label chemical treatments or provide unofficial withholding advice. Our goal is to explain the terminology and context so you can make informed decisions in consultation with their veterinarian where appropriate.

## **Can I feed the discarded eggs back to my chickens?**

It is common practice for flock owners to boil discarded eggs and feed them back to their chickens as a high-protein treat during a withholding window. It can be an appealing way to reduce waste and recycle valuable nutrition back into the flock.

One consideration sometimes raised is that this may reintroduce trace amounts of the active ingredient to the birds.

## **Ivermectin-based products (e.g., Noromectin, Ausmectin, Cydectin)**

There are currently no spot-on, pour-on, or injectable ivermectin products approved by the APVMA (Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority) for use in egg-producing or meat-producing poultry.<sup>38</sup>

For this reason, Aussie Chook Supplies does not recommend or support using cattle or sheep ivermectin products on chickens.

While off-label use of livestock ivermectin products is frequently discussed across online forums and poultry groups, we encourage flock owners to do their own research and carefully consider the available information, including regulatory guidance and the long-term suitability of these products for backyard poultry.

## **Should we rotate through different active ingredients?**

When treatments are administered accurately and according to official product labels, there is generally no need to rotate active ingredients in a typical backyard setting.<sup>39</sup>

More important than rotation is correct dosing, completing treatment courses properly, and avoiding unnecessary treatment where monitoring or testing suggests worming is not required.<sup>39</sup>

If worms have caused meaningful illness or damage, another common question is what recovery actually looks like afterwards.

## Are there any long-term effects on my chickens after a worm infestation?

Yes. Meaningful worm burdens can damage the delicate lining of the digestive tract, reducing the bird's ability to absorb nutrients efficiently.<sup>40</sup> Recovery takes time and may be slower in birds that experienced reduced appetite, weight loss, or prolonged parasite burdens.<sup>40</sup>

The good news is that many birds recover well with time and supportive care.<sup>40</sup> Recovery focuses on restoring good nutrition, encouraging normal feed intake, and rebuilding overall condition as the digestive system heals.<sup>41</sup> To support recovery, we developed targeted nutritional formulations in consultation with one of Australia's leading avian specialist veterinarians to address common nutritional challenges during recovery.

- [Natural Chicken Health Poultry Probiotic Porridge](#)  
Formulated to support beneficial gut flora and encourage digestive recovery while helping birds return to normal feed intake.
- [Natural Chicken Health Plus Poultry Booster](#)  
Formulated to provide targeted nutritional support, vitamins, and immune support during periods of recovery, stress, or reduced condition.

# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

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## M.O.N.I.T.O.R

Parasite control isn't about eliminating every worm.  
It's about understanding risk and making informed decisions.

When managing your flock, remember to M.O.N.I.T.O.R.

- M** — Monitor changes in behaviour, droppings, body condition, and egg production.
- O** — Observe conditions that may increase parasite exposure.
- N** — Notice symptoms but avoid jumping straight to conclusions.
- I** — Investigate further using FEC testing or flock history where appropriate.
- T** — Treat only when there is a clear reason to do so.
- O** — Optimise the environment to reduce reinfection pressure.
- R** — Reassess and repeat the process if conditions change.

## One last thing

At the end of the day, you know your flock better than anyone.

Parasite control isn't about eliminating every single worm—it's about understanding risk, paying attention to changes, and making informed decisions for your birds and your setup.

Aussie Chook Supplies does not publish specific off-label dosage rates or veterinary treatment protocols on our website.

If you still have questions, want help thinking through your flock's situation, or simply want to know more, feel free to drop us an email or call/text Christine on 0483 930 316. We're always happy to help.

## GLOSSARY

Quick reference for technical terms used throughout this guide.

### **Active Ingredient**

The ingredient in a medication responsible for controlling or treating parasites.

### **Broad-Spectrum Wormer**

A product designed to target multiple types of internal worms rather than a single species.

### **Caecal Worm (*Heterakis gallinarum*)**

A worm that lives in the caecum (part of the lower digestive tract).

### **Environmental Management**

Practical changes to flock conditions that may help reduce ongoing parasite exposure.

### **FEC (Faecal Egg Count)**

A laboratory test used to detect and estimate parasite egg shedding in droppings.

### **Free Range / Free-Ranging**

Allowing chickens access to outdoor areas where they can scratch and forage.

## **Hairworm (*Capillaria spp.*)**

Fine, thread-like worms that can affect different parts of the digestive tract and are often difficult to detect without testing.

## ***Histomonas meleagridis***

The parasite associated with Blackhead disease in poultry.

## **Immature Worm**

A developing parasite that may not yet be producing eggs and may not appear in FEC results.

## **Intermediate Host**

An animal involved in part of a parasite's life cycle before chickens become infected.

## **Life Cycle**

The stages a parasite goes through to survive, reproduce, and spread.

## **Monitoring**

Regularly observing your flock and reassessing changes over time rather than automatically treating.

## **NIL Withholding Period**

A registered statement indicating eggs or meat may be consumed immediately when the product is used according to label directions.

## **Off-Label Use**

Using a product in a way that differs from its approved label instructions.

## **Parasite**

An organism that lives on or inside another organism and benefits at the host's expense.

## **Parasite Pressure**

The overall level of parasite exposure and reinfection risk present within an environment.

## **Pooled Sample**

A sample created by combining droppings from multiple birds to assess flock-level parasite activity.

## **Resistance**

Reduced effectiveness of a treatment over time due to repeated exposure or inappropriate use.

## **Large Roundworm (*Ascaridia galli*)**

One of the most commonly identified internal worms in chickens.

## **Symptom**

A physical or behavioural change that may indicate something is wrong.

## **Tapeworm (*Cestodes* sp).**

A flat, segmented worm that attaches to the intestine.

## **Transmission**

The process by which parasites move between birds.

## **Treatment Course**

The complete period and method required for a treatment to work effectively.

## **Withholding Period**

The required period before eggs or meat are considered suitable for consumption after treatment.

## **Worm Burden**

The overall impact parasites are having on a bird—not simply the number present.

## **Worming**

The use of medication or management practices intended to reduce internal parasite burden.

## REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

For readers interested in exploring topics in more detail, additional supporting resources relevant to poultry health, parasite management, and practical flock care may be made available over time.

### Product information & regulatory resources

Australian Veterinary Association (AVA).

[Guidelines for Prescribing, Authorising and Dispensing Veterinary Medicines.](#)<sup>35</sup>

Avitrol Plus Product Label.

Go to the [Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority \(APVMA\) Public Chemical Registration Information System \(PUBCRIS\)](#) Search product name "Avitrol Plus."<sup>37</sup>

Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA).

[Public Chemical Registration Information System Search \(PUBCRIS\).](#)<sup>38</sup>

Search "ivermectin" to view registered products and approved uses.

## Veterinary & poultry health resources

MSD Veterinary Manual.

[Parasitology in Veterinary Practice.](#) <sup>1 4 6 9</sup>

NSW Department of Primary Industries.

[DIY Worm Egg Counts \(Livestock Including Poultry\).](#) <sup>2 3 7 8</sup>

MSD Veterinary Manual.

[Helminthiasis in Poultry.](#) <sup>10-14 40 41</sup>

University of Maryland Extension.

[Recognizing and Preventing Internal Parasites \(Worms\) in Small Flocks \(FS-999\).](#) <sup>19 20 21</sup>

Penn State Extension.

[Deworming Backyard Poultry.](#) <sup>24</sup>

World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

[Responsible and prudent use of anthelmintic chemicals to help control anthelmintic resistance in grazing livestock species.](#) <sup>25</sup>

University of Minnesota Extension.

[Preventing Heat Stress in Poultry.](#) <sup>26</sup>

[Elanco Flubenol \(Flubendazole\) Product Information and Label Directions.](#) <sup>27 28</sup>

National Center for Biotechnology Information (PubChem).  
[Levamisole Compound Summary.](#) <sup>29</sup>

[Vetsense Kilverm Poultry Wormer Product Information.](#) <sup>30</sup>

National Center for Biotechnology Information (PubChem).  
[Piperazine Compound Summary.](#) <sup>31 32</sup>

National Center for Biotechnology Information (PubChem).  
[Praziquantel Compound Summary.](#) <sup>33 34</sup>

Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA).  
[Withholding Periods \(Residues\).](#) <sup>36</sup>

## **Practical backyard resources**

Parasite Diagnostics.  
[Collecting Samples for Diagnostic Testing.](#) <sup>5</sup>