

Ringworm

This is caused by a fungal infection and not a worm! Classic lesions show as round areas of hair loss anywhere on the body or face which may spread. It is a highly contagious disease spread by direct contact (horse to horse) or indirect contact (e.g. via shared grooming kit, rugs, tack, contaminated fence posts etc.). Griseofulvin powder is now an outdated treatment and now known to be carcinogenic. Ringworm is easily and effectively treated with potent antifungal washes such as Imaverol. Contaminated rugs etc. should also be sprayed or washed in Imaverol.

Lice infestation

If your horse becomes infected with lice (very often in the Spring) he or she will take on a “moth eaten” appearance and will be pruritic (itchy). Biting lice and sucking lice can affect our equine friends and they are spread by direct contact rather like “nits” in school children. Areas may bleed due to the self trauma caused by scratching. Debilitated horses are more susceptible. The lice can either be seen with a magnifying glass or their presence confirmed by brushings taken from the skin. The lice and their eggs are best killed by ivermectin-based treatments. Louse powder is not always effective especially in cases of heavy infestation.

Chorioptic mange

This condition usually affects heavily feathered horses and is caused by the mite Chorioptic equi. The mites usually live on the distal limb but sometimes can migrate to the abdomen, groin or axilla and cause itching with classic foot stamping and chewing of the affected areas. An allergic factor may also be involved. As irritated areas become raw from the self trauma, secondary infections result with oozing purulent sores. The condition is easily confirmed by the history and presence of the mite in the brushings. Any secondary infection should be treated by clipping out the area and washing with an appropriate antibacterial shampoo. Various antiparasitic washes will kill the mites and sulphur based shampoos also discourage their presence. Some horses may carry the mite yet show little sign of irritation so all in contact horses should be checked.

The best treatment for mites involves a combination of washing with ivermectin shampoo, clipping the legs and replacing the bedding that mites may have lived in. A dectomax injection can sometimes work well too.

Mud fever and rain scald

These conditions are caused by the bacterium Dermatophilus congolensis and are basically one in the same. Mud fever generally affects the lower limb (especially white haired areas) and rain scald, the body. The bacteria lives in wet soil and gains entry through damaged skin (sounds repulsive doesn't it!). The scabs that develop (which look like the end of a clogged up paint brush) contain more bacteria which can then infect another horse. Under the scabs the legs are raw and sore. However, the condition is easily treated and responsive to a course of antibiotic (e.g. penicillin) if severe. The area should be clipped out, scabs should be softened and lifted off and the areas washed with an antibacterial wash (Malaseb or Hibiscrub).

ALWAYS USE WARM WATER AND PAT THE LEGS DRY WITH ABSORBENT PAPER TOWEL.

This way you do not do further damage to the skin and the hair follicles are opened up to stop the bacteria from gaining entry again.

Pastern Dermatitis

This term covers a wide range of skin conditions affecting the lower limb including chorioptic mange and mud fever listed above. However if the above listed diseases are left untreated, secondary bacteria especially Streptococci and Staphylococci, gain entry through damaged skin and can produce a very painful condition called folliculitis. This is when these bugs get deep into the hair follicles which is a real safe haven for them and they are very difficult to access and kill. The condition can also affect the mane and tail.

These are those cases that don't get better with the standard treatments for any primary disease treated and the areas are so tender and painful that even touching them can evoke a nasty kick, so sedatives and painkillers are often required just so that any treatment can be carried out. Even worse, antibiotics cannot get into the hair follicles in sufficient quantity to kill the bacteria so topical treatment tends to be the way forward.

If your horse is unlucky enough to suffer from this condition, stabling or yarding is vital during treatment wherever possible. Topical prescription creams work well, combined with other medicines, as needed, depending on each case.

Sunburn

This problem also affects horses especially those with unpigmented skin (white haired areas or flesh marks). Obviously the most likely area to be affected is the lower face and muzzle in hot sunny weather. The area becomes burnt and the skin peels off leaving the area open to infection. Prevention is better than cure so if your horse is a candidate or has suffered from the problem before, then use a high factor sun block and keep them out of the sun where possible. Sometimes the liver may be damaged leading to a process called photosensitisation and similar signs will be seen. These cases can be more serious and the cause of the liver damage must be found and treated.



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Rain scald