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Mites and Lice

Mites

Clinical Signs

By far the most common mite affecting horses is Chorioptes. These mites tend to affect the legs of horses with plenty of feather. They cause irritation which is commonly manifested by stamping of the hindlimbs, chewing of the forelimbs and rubbing the legs on each other or on the stable / fenceposts. Badly affected horses often have thickened skin and scabs, particularly around the pasterns. Some horses develop bleeding sores and secondary bacterial infection can cause lameness and swollen legs.

Other species of mite can occasionally cause itchiness and skin lesions elsewhere on the body such as the face and neck.

Diagnosis

The clinical signs of itchy legs in a horse with feathers is usually enough to make a diagnosis, but brushings of the hair can be taken for microscopic examination if required. Lesions elsewhere on the body may be subjected to a skin scrape to obtain samples for examination under the microscope.

Treatment

There are no licensed treatments available. Many horses with feather will never be completely free from mites so it is more a case of keeping the condition to a level where it is not causing a significant problem. Our advice on treatment is as follows:

For mild cases:

Clip feather off once a month, wash legs in Hibiscrub or Seleen (to remove dirt and grease from the skin and keep secondary bacterial infection at bay), use shavings bedding and clear it all out monthly after clipping and washing the legs. Treat any scabs or lesions with antiseptic cream such as Dermisol. Adding an "anti-itch" supplement to the feed such as Dodson & Horrell Itch Free may help to reduce irritation and self trauma. The old fashioned remedy of Flowers of Sulphur in Pig Oil applied every few days often helps although it can be very messy to use.

For severe cases:

There are a variety of treatments available which are prescription only medicines. We need to examine the horse to confirm the diagnosis and advise on the most appropriate treatment which could include injections, special washes or sprays. Antibiotic creams may be required to treat secondary bacterial infection.

Long term management of affected horses:

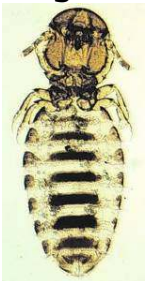
Turn out as much as possible (But look out for mud rash if the legs are clipped and the ground is wet and muddy). You may need to use an antiseptic barrier cream (such as Protocon or Protection Plus Cream) if there are any lesions or the skin is already damaged. Use a shavings bed (or medicated bed such as Easi-Bed or Nedz Bed Pro) and clear out the bedding regularly. Clip the feathers off all legs once monthly if you can do.

Lice

Clinical Signs

Lice infestations are very common in late winter and early spring, particularly in horses and ponies with plenty of hair. They are almost always associated with intense itchiness. Affected horses often rub off large patches of hair and can traumatise the skin to leave sores. The worst affected areas are usually the mane, forelock, lower neck and base of tail, although badly affected horses may have lice all over.

Diagnosis



Any horses showing intense itchiness in winter and early spring are quite likely to have lice. The lice are just big enough to be seen with the naked eye and can often be seen moving around. Louse eggs may also be seen as small white eggs attached to the hair shafts. There are different types of lice which can be identified by taking brushings

Treatment

We recommend using products containing permethrin which will kill the lice rather than just repel them. Most louse powders are merely repellents and are rarely enough to cure a chronic infestation. The easiest way to apply a permethrin product is in the form of Switch pour-on. This should be applied weekly for 4 weeks so any larvae hatching out of the eggs are killed as well. If there are several horses to treat, it may be easier using Barricade spray. Powders can be applied to in contact horses to reduce the risk of infestation transferring to them. Rugs should be washed or treated with powder or spray. Lice are contagious to other horses so try to keep affected horses isolated if possible and monitor other horses for signs of infestation. The louse species affecting horses cannot be passed on to humans but it is not impossible for them to give an occasional bite!