



Mud Fever

Mud fever is a common condition relating to pain, heat and inflammation of the skin of the lower limbs, mainly the pastern and heel. The disease is most often seen in the winter months and as its name suggests occurs when the horse is exposed to persistent wet, muddy conditions. It can also occur in a less severe form during the summer months where the heels have scabs and matted hair. The horse often resents the area being examined due to pain. Often legs with white markings are worst affected. There may be a genetic link to the condition but management of the horse has a significant contributing factor. Damage to the skin over a period of time allows many different opportunist bacteria and fungi to enter and cause infection.

Treatment

The aim of treatment must be to provide an environment on the skin within which bacteria are controlled.

- **Close clipping** of the hair or feathers of the lower limbs is essential to control bacterial growth and note the extent of the lesions. As the condition can be very painful, some badly affected horses may require sedation.
- **Antibacterial washes** e.g. Hibiscrub may be beneficial but continued use can be detrimental. There are creams and dressings on the market with antibacterial properties (some contain silver), which can be beneficial.
- **Keep the affected areas dry.** This often means avoiding turnout but it does not mean the horse cannot be exercised. On the contrary, exercise often improves circulation and encourages fluid redistribution from swollen limbs. This in turn can help to alleviate pain.
- **Remove scabs** as they often harbour bacteria underneath so it is important to encourage them to lift. If firmly attached they may lift following the application of a moist gel e.g. Intrasite gel.
- **Injectable or oral antibiotics** may not help because of the number of different types of organisms involved in the infection. The antibiotic may not be able to reach a level on the skin in sufficient numbers to kill the bacteria.
- **Anti-inflammatory drugs** may help to improve horse comfort and assist treatment.
- **Udder cream** will soothe and soften cracked skin preventing bacteria entering minor wounds.

Prevention

Repeated regular washing and rubbing dry of affected limbs can cause further skin damage. It is often better to let mud dry and gently brush off the dried material with a soft brush (Not a dandy brush as these can scratch the skin and allow infection in). Applying a barrier ointment e.g. Protocon or powder e.g. Keratex Mud Shield Powder can prevent the legs becoming wet and infected if applied to completely dry legs prior to turnout. Some of the bacteria involved are contagious, so disinfect grooming brushes and dispose of any scabs away from other horses.

Early recognition and treatment of mud fever is important in the control of this debilitating condition. Prognosis for each case is variable. Deep-seated infections will invariably take longer to treat and are more likely to flare-up again.

If you have any questions regarding mud fever please feel free to contact us.