

Skin Diseases and Allergies



If you spend time with horses, you are bound to encounter one who has a skin disease or allergy. These common afflictions, while not usually severe, are unsightly and more importantly, uncomfortable for the horse. In the summer, hot humid days and biting insects create the perfect conditions for skin diseases. Horses can also be allergic to things they eat and products we apply. Here are some of the most common equine skin problems:



HIVES

Symptoms: Itchy round reddened swellings of the skin. The hair will often stand up on the bump and may eventually fall out.

Causes: It is not a specific disease and is often caused by an allergic reaction. Horses may be allergic to any substance, but the most common triggers are bugs, dust, moulds, drugs, food and pollens.

Potential Treatment: Removing the trigger is frequently the best course of treatment. The chestnut mare pictured (above, right) gets hives from fly spray, so she wears a fly sheet as protection instead.

RAIN ROT, RAIN SCALD

Symptoms: Crusty lesions which can spread all over the body. The horse's hair is easily removed, exposing the skin beneath.

Causes: Rain rot often occurs when the horse is wet for a prolonged period of time. It is a bacterial infection.

Potential Treatment: Affected animals should be protected from exposure to rainfall. An antibacterial topical may be helpful in treatment. In severe cases, veterinary intervention may be required.

AURAL FLAT WARTS

Symptoms: Raised white or grey bumps which occur on the ear.

Causes: It is caused by the papillomavirus; in the summer, black flies feed on horses' ears and it is thought that they may transmit the virus.

Potential Treatment: Aural flat warts don't seem to cause the horse discomfort and have little impact on the horse's health, despite their unsightly appearance. If treatment is required, the warts can be pinched off, crushed or frozen. Surgery is an option.

Quick Keywords

Dermatitis: Any skin disease that is inflammatory

Dermatosis: Any skin disease, particularly one without inflammation

Urticaria: Acute skin swellings, also known as hives

Papules: A firm, round elevation of the skin (usually less than a centimeter in width)

Aural: relating to the ear

Lesion: A wound, an abrasion

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SCRATCHES, MUD FEVER

Symptoms: Painful papules on the pastern and fetlock which can become pus-filled

Causes: Most often occurs when the horse's lower limbs are moist for a prolonged period of time. It is a bacterial infection.

Potential Treatment: Keep the infected area dry and clean. An antibacterial topical may be helpful in treatment.

Also known as: Pastern dermatitis, greasy heels, cracked heels and dew poisoning

RINGWORM

Symptoms: Affected horses exhibit circular patches of hair loss, scaling, crusting and itching, which can occur all over the body and head.

Causes: Ringworm is caused by fungi which attack the outer layers of the skin. Transmission occurs by direct contact with infected animals or contaminated objects such as brushes and tack. Ringworm *can be spread from horse to human*, so handle infected horses last, using gloves and wash hands afterwards.

Potential Treatment: Ringworm can be treated by shaving the affected area and applying an antifungal medication to the site. Blankets, tack and other objects that have come in contact with the horse should be disinfected thoroughly.

Keep Clean!

Cleanliness is vital in the prevention and treatment of equine skin diseases.

Here are five easy things you can do:

- Groom your horse well before and after riding
- Clean your tack regularly to remove sweat and dirt
- Each horse should have its own set of brushes
- Clean your grooming tools regularly
- Use clean saddle pads, blankets and halters



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To learn more about equine health, register for Equine Guelph's [Equine Health & Disease Prevention](#) online course.