

## Spring Horse Issues

by Shannon Ott

Spring is a happy time for most of us horse enthusiasts. The weather is warmer, the grass begins growing, days become longer; generally things that lead to more time in the saddle, or spending time doing your favorite activity with your horse. However, spring can also bring about a variety of health issues that make these same activities difficult to do, sometimes impossible. Knowing how to detect, treat, and prevent these diseases can improve the quality of your horse's life, while helping you get the most out of the warm months.



### Pastern Dermatitis (EPD):



Also known as scratches, mud fever, dew poisoning, and greasy heel. This disease has been well documented since the 1800s and is characterized by lesions (appearing as scratches) developing on the back of the pastern. These lesions then develop into larger scabby regions that may ooze. In serious cases this can result in lameness on the affected limbs.

Pastern Dermatitis is a disease complex that is caused by multiple factors including parasites, bacteria, fungi. When there is a lot of moisture in the environment of the horse, the skin is softened and easier for these undesirables to permeate. Horses standing in muddy/ unhygienic conditions are more susceptible making the spring/summer months the perfect time for EPD to strike.

Treatment for Pastern Dermatitis should be discussed with a vet. Given that it is a complex and caused by many factors, the treatment is not always the same. Common treatment will involve clipping and cleaning the affected area

(generally with betadine or chlorhexidine). Your vet will likely prescribe a topical medication and may also recommend pain relievers like bute or banamine or even an antibiotic in some cases. The horse will also need to be kept from any environmental factors that could be a cause, ideally in a stall, but at the very least in a dry turnout.

Cleaning out stalls/run-ins, as well as giving horses plenty of access to clean, dry areas, are the best ways to prevent pastern dermatitis from affecting your horse.

### Rain Rot

During the spring and summer months when rain is more prevalent, the skin of the horse becomes soft allowing more abrasions to occur. When this happens bacteria that exist on the horse, and typically cause no problem, seep into the skin. One of these is the bacteria that causes rain rot, *Dermatophilus congolensis*.

Rain rot appears as small lesions that become scabs ultimately resulting in hair loss. Unlike other skin conditions, it is generally more painful than itchy. Your horse may react sensitive to the area. Rain Rot is seen most commonly on the topline of the horse, but can occur anywhere on the horse. Immunocompromised horses, old, and, young horses may be more at risk, but any horse, regardless of breed or age can get rain rot. Treatment typically involves a bath with antimicrobial shampoo, and treatment with OTC medicine.

Some common medications used for rainrot are: banixx, coat defence, and equiderma. Regular grooming, bathing, and providing adequate shelter are the best preventative measures against rain rot.



### Abscesses

Wet weather can also bring about hoof issues, one of the most common being abscesses. Hoof abscesses are characterized as a bacteria infection trapped in the hoof. Going from wet to dry conditions can cause brittle hooves, leading to cracking, allowing bacteria to enter the hoof. Abscesses are very similar to pimples in that they are little balls of pus that eventually expel, however the hoof, unlike skin, is unable to expand to account for the abscess, generally causing a great deal of pain. Horses with abscesses can be exhibited walking as if they had a broken leg causing a lot of concern.

The abscess will eventually find the path of least resistance to discharge from, normally the coronary band or the bulb of the hoof. While the horse will normally work out this issue on its own, the pain they experience makes human intervention needed. With the help of a vet, farrier, or both, you can normally find and create a path for the abscess to escape. You then will need to keep the area clean, dry, and packed. Your vet may also recommend a pain reliever such as bute to keep your horse comfortable while they heal.

In the event that the abscess is too deep in the hoof to be expelled, the use of epsom salts may be needed to help draw out the infection. Soaking the hoof in warm epsom salt water, or using epsom salt poultice, are great ways to help the infection out of the hoof. This process takes longer, and does not provide immediate relief so the use of pain reliever for comfort will likely be recommended by your vet.

Prevention of abscesses include keeping debris away from the pathways of horses, cleaning stalls, and providing dry turnout. It is also important to note that sometimes horses will have and expel an abscess without the owner ever knowing they had one to begin with.

### Thrush

Thrush is caused by anaerobic bacteria getting into the frog of the hoof. Most commonly in wet/muddy fields, unsanitary conditions, or overgrown hooves. Thrush starts superficially, but will work its way deeper without intervention eventually causing lameness. It appears as a foul odor with a black tar substance, and is oftentimes diagnosed and treated by the owner with OTC medication. Common medications include thrush buster and Koppertox.



Routine cleaning of the hooves, minimizing wet or dirty areas, and trimming regularly are the best preventative measures for thrush.

While this focus has been on how these particular ailments can affect horses in the summer months, particularly during wet conditions, they can happen all year round. Staying vigilant and practicing good horse care are the best ways to prevent these illnesses as well as combat them.