

EQUINE NOVEMBER 2014 NEWSLETTER

Atypical Myopathy in Horses

Horse owners are being urged to stay vigilant and keep their animals away from sycamore trees following a spate of tragic deaths from atypical myopathy. Atypical myopathy is a fatal muscle disease thought to be caused by the chronic ingestion of hypoglycin A, a toxin contained in sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) seeds.

A recent study in the *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine* by Unger et al, has confirmed the presence of hypoglycin A in *Acer pseudoplatanus*, and preventing horses from grazing in fields or on land containing sycamore trees during late autumn and early spring might be an effective way of reducing the incidence of atypical myopathy.

Young horses appear to be more susceptible, as are those being grazed on parched land.

The advice for owners includes:

- Feed forage, such as hay, in parched fields, off the floor in haynets or feedracks
- Do not over stock
- Limit turnout, ideally stabling horses overnight
- Section off areas around poisonous trees and collect and dispose of leaves safely away from horses
- Remove young sapling plants
- Be careful of streams running through paddocks as atypical myopathy is thought to be more prevalent in moist conditions
- Ensure you check your horse at least twice daily
- Be vigilant of the potential signs of this disease and act quickly if your horse becomes poorly.

The clinical effects of the disease may include depression, muscle weakness, colic-like symptoms and dark red urine. A prompt diagnosis is more likely to lead to a positive outcome.

Red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) are also toxic to horses, causing haemolysis (the disintegration of red blood cells with the release of haemoglobin) and methaemaglobinaemia (an overall reduced ability of the red blood cell to release oxygen to tissues). Clinical signs include cold or pale skin and anaemia and in some cases death can occur within 24 hours.

RAINSCALD



What is rainsoot?

Rainsoot, also known as 'rain rot', is a skin disease that is more common during the winter months, due to the frequent periods of rain, snow and damp conditions where the horse's coat can remain wet for long periods of time.

The disease is caused by the bacterium *Dermatophilus congolensis*. During dry months the bacteria remains dormant, but can be spread from horse to horse via grooming kits, tack, rugs etc. Longer winter coats and damp conditions aid the development of the disease by protecting the bacteria from sunlight and maintaining moisture required for the bacteria to reproduce and spread.



In the early stages of rainsoot rough, raised bumps can be felt but not seen. These then develop into painful, crusty scabs which form under the hair clumps and when removed leave a reddish ulcer in the skin. The most common areas to be affected are the saddle area, croup, loins, neck and in severe cases this can spread to the abdomen area.

How to treat and prevent rainsoot



Careful grooming is required to remove the scabs and in some cases a medicated shampoo is used to soften the scabs and kill the bacteria. A cream is applied to help heal the skin.

The bacteria can persist in the environment and on equipment for several months, so to prevent a recurrence it is essential to clean/disinfect tack and equipment used on the horse.

Remember that prevention is better than a cure so good hygiene and a clean dry horse is the best safeguard against the disease.

MUD FEVER

What is mud fever?

Mud fever can range from a mild skin irritation to very painful infected sores, and can in some cases cause swelling with lameness. The condition usually affects the back of the pastern but can also occur higher on the leg or belly.

What causes mud fever?

Mud fever is often caused by a mixture of bacteria. The bacteria cannot invade healthy skin but the bacteria can enter when rain and mud soften the skin, and constant wetting and drying of the legs causes the skin in this area to chap. Therefore mud fever is more common during the wet winter months. However anything which breaks the skin can allow the bacteria to invade, such as a small cut or wound, sunburn, mites or contact with irritants.

For these reasons muddy conditions are not always necessary for mud fever to occur. In some cases mud fever can be caused by fungus. All horses can be affected, but some horses seem more prone than others, for example, horses with white and/or hairless pasterns appear to suffer more. Horses or ponies with heavy feather on the leg can be particularly prone in extremely muddy conditions, as the hair becomes covered in wet mud and remains damp.



How is mud fever treated?

Thoroughly wash the affected limb(s) with an antibacterial wash/shampoo to remove the crusts and exudate. The scabs may form again quickly so initially the legs must be washed daily. The scabs should not be picked off, but should be washed off when ready and softened with ointments/creams. It is important to dispose of the scabs properly as they harbour the infection and can remain infectious for years!

The leg must then be DRIED thoroughly with a clean towel or cool hair drier (with circuit breaker). Once dry, **the hair should be clipped away around the lesion (this may require sedation) and a suitable ointment/cream applied.** Sometimes bandaging the leg after applying cream can help. It is sometimes necessary to stable horses that are badly affected, to prevent the skin from any further wetting or exposure to mud until the skin surface is healed.

How is mud fever prevented ?

To prevent the skin from chapping it is better not to hose down muddy legs but allow the mud to dry and then brush it off. If this is not a practical option, then it is very important that the legs are dried thoroughly after washing.



Application of a barrier cream to **DRY** and **CLEAN** legs prior to exercise or turnout will help to prevent the skin coming into contact with the bacteria. If bandaging prior to exercise, ensure the legs are clean and dry beforehand and the bandages removed immediately afterwards to avoid any grit or coarse material traumatising the skin surface. Ensure that bedding is clean, dry and non irritant to the lower limbs.

Wherever possible avoid horses standing in poached paddocks and gateways. Stabling the horse for part of the day or night will allow the legs to dry off. Most importantly of all, inspect your horse's legs daily to spot any early signs of infection.

**If you think your horse is suffering from mud fever
please contact a member of our equine team on 01729 823538.**

AUTUMN CASTRATE OFFER

As usual throughout October and November Dalehead are offering a discount on standing castrations if paid for at the time.

For castrations done at your own yard or stable there will be a discount of 15% plus your usual visit charge but if the work is done at our Equine Clinic at

Rathmell there will be a discount of 20% and the benefit of no visit charge.

This offer does not include any drugs prescribed for post castration care or tetanus antitoxin.

Please contact Kate or Sarah at the surgery on 01729 823538 to book an appointment.

PASSPORTS

We would like to remind all clients to have your passport available when the vet comes to visit your horse.

Please also ensure that **Section 9** of your horse's passport is completed. This should signed by you and countersigned by a vet.

Should you have any queries please call the surgery

Check out our website www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk for more information about caring for your pet, special offers, vet and staff profiles and much more!



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