



Lilydale Clinic

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Mud Fever

One of the most common problems vets are called out to see in winter is mud fever, also known as caudal pastern dermatitis or greasy heel.

This condition is painful for horses and owners alike, it causes discomfort to the horse and can be very difficult for owners to treat and can be quite persistent and difficult to get rid of. Horses that have pink skin and white hair on their pasterns are the most predisposed to the infection. Other predisposing factors are long hair around the pastern and standing in constant wet and muddy conditions.

The condition presents as painful thick, crusty, yellow scabs around the back of the heels and the pastern, it is most common on the hind feet but can occur on all four feet and in severe cases can spread around the front of the feet as well. In severe cases the skin becomes thickened and inflamed (red) and the legs may swell.

Most commonly it is caused by an infection with bacteria, usually *Dermatophilus congolensis* and sometimes *Staphylococcus aureus*. Cases that are not resolving with standard treatment will need testing by a vet to ensure there is not another infection present, such as mites or fungi, or in unusual cases an immune mediated condition (body attacking itself).

Treatment initially involves topical therapy. Clipping the hair away and washing the legs to remove all mud, followed by keeping the horse in dry conditions, such as a stable, is extremely important. Antibacterial treatment with a shampoo such as malaseb, or an antiseptic such as chlorhexidine is important to kill the bacterial and soaking the legs to soften and remove the scabs is the only way to cure the problem, for every little scab is a residual patch of bacteria. Scab removal may need to be done in stages to avoid hurting the horse. The scabs are potentially contagious and you should wear gloves and avoid contacting the scabs with other horses or leaving them lying around in the paddock or wash bay. Scab removal and washing should be followed by drying the legs and then applying a moisturising antibacterial cream such as potties white ointment or prednoderma (vet only).

A WORD OF WARNING – horses with this condition can be very irritable and painful and may not tolerate their legs being handled and washed. Even quiet horses can lash out and kick violently if their legs are sore so please be careful. A vet may need to come and sedate the horse in order to properly treat the infection.

If the scabs are not clearing with topical treatment you will need a vet visit to ensure there is no other underlying cause and to dispense antibiotics and pain relief as needed. As with any infection please ensure your horse is up to date with tetanus vaccinations.

There are a lot of 'home remedies' for this condition, some good and some that can make to condition worse, so if you are not sure then check with your vet first!

For more information, please call us on (03) 9739 5244