



Mud Fever (Pastern Dermatitis)

Pastern dermatitis, also known as scratches, greasy heel, mud fever, mud rash, cracked heels, and dew poisoning, has been well documented in horses since the early 1800s.

Causes

These can include environmental factors, allergies, drug reactions, fungi, bacteria (often *Staphylococcus*) is present in the majority of cases, Rain-scald (infection with *Dermatophilus* bacteria), parasites (Chorioptic mite infestation) and vascular changes of white legs to Photosensitisation/Sunburn associated with liver disease or certain plants. Extended exposure to moisture, in the form of wet bedding, muddy pastures, etc., seems to be a common cause or perpetuating factor.

Clinical Signs

It is commonly characterized by inflammation of the skin on the back of the pastern & lower legs, by redness, scabs, and discharge, erosions, and ulcerations develop, followed by swelling (oedema) of the affected limb(s). The skin can be itchy and sensitive. Lameness is observed in some cases and can become severe. Often horses with feathered legs, white legs, or pink skin are more susceptible.

Treatment

Treatment of pastern dermatitis depends on the underlying cause. Antibiotic therapy, accompanied by clipping and mildly cleansing the affected area (with topical corticosteroid application if no improvement after one week), is acceptable initially. Trimethoprim-sulfa antibiotics, oral corticosteroids, and/or resolution or control of the underlying disease process, are the most common treatment approaches. In some cases, avoiding sun exposure may be helpful.

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Prevention

Prevention of pastern dermatitis generally relies on avoiding exposure of the area to recurrent moisture, as well as any potential contagious organisms such as fungi and mites. Avoidance of moisture includes limiting turnout of horses in wet grass or muddy pastures, drying the pastern areas well after bathing, keeping hair clipped on the lower legs, and avoiding long-term use of boots and wraps that can trap moisture. Proper stable hygiene, including providing clean, dry bedding, is essential for preventing pastern dermatitis and other health and welfare issues.

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