

Skin is the largest organ of the body. It's a vital covering of the underlying skeleton, microbes. It has to flex and bend, control temperature, produce warm hair during the winter and be totally waterproof. Dermatology is the study of skin conditions, and there are literally thousands of things that can affect your horse's skin. Here are a few that might bother your horse during the course of the year.

MUD FEVER AND RAIN SCALD

These are common skin conditions particularly during the Winter months. Moisture damages the skin, allowing bacteria (and sometimes fungi) to invade.

Mud fever: affects the legs, especially pink skin (white hair areas). Causes thick, painful scabs severe cases may lead to swelling and lameness from secondary infection.

Rain scald: affects the body in areas that stay wet (under mane, belly, back under wet rugs). Causes scabs and hair loss ("paint-brush" lesions).

Treatment & prevention:

- Wash with antiseptic solution, remove scabs, rinse and dry thoroughly.
- Apply antiseptic creams if needed.

Keep the horse dry. Recovery and prevention are poor in wet conditions and therefore, the horse needs to be kept clean and dry to allow the skin to heal.



LICE

Very common in winter, lice can be seen with the naked eye and are easy to treat. Horses may show hair loss around the head, neck and upper thigh. The best treatment is a wash as this gets deep into the coat. Powders tend to sit on top of the coat. Treat high between the legs and under the mane as these warm, dark areas are ideal for lice. Clipping off a thick coat may also be necessary.

MITES

Mites are common, causing horses to scratch, stamp, and bite their lower legs. Scabs similar to mud fever and flaky skin behind the knees may develop.

They most often affect feathered horses, but any horse can react to mite bites. Mites usually target the legs but can spread to the head when horses scratch, leading to bald facial patches.

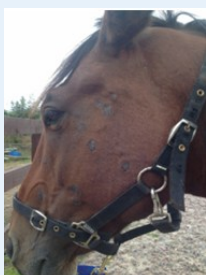
There are no licensed mite treatments for horses in the UK, so vets may use cattle, dog, or cat products off licence. Clipping feathers helps by removing the warm, moist environment mites prefer. If your horse is persistently scratching, consult your vet for treatment.

SARCOIDS

If your horse has a lump or mass that is affecting the skin get it checked by your vet. Sarcoids are (mostly) benign tumours of the skin. They are 'contagious' between horses that get sarcoids and are commonly spread by biting flies. They appear in summer and grow in winter. There are five main types of sarcoids and they are all difficult and expensive to treat; recurrence is likely. Early treatment gives the best results.



RINGWORM



Quite common in younger horses, ringworm is a self limiting disease, meaning it eventually disappears by itself. It is caused by a fungus and can be passed to humans. The fungus feeds on the hair and the top layer of skin causes bald, round lesions that heal from the middle. Horses are often undeterred by having the condition, but some can be itchy or the hairless round lesions can appear inflamed. Treatment is using an anti-fungal wash. The response may appear slow, but after a few treatments the condition is less contagious. Remember to treat all rugs and blankets as they can harbour the fungus. The incubation period for ringworm varies but is between a few days to one month.