



MUDFEVER & RAIN SCALD FACT SHEET

What are Mud Fever and Rain Scald?

Mud fever (greasy heel) and rain scald, also known as dermatophilosis, are both skin infections caused by the bacterium *Dermatophilus Congolensis*. This bacterium is a normal inhabitant of the skin of horses but with persistent wetting and/or damage to the skin, infection occurs. Mud fever affects the lower limbs whereas rain scald lesions are distributed over the body, neck and head (Fig. 1).

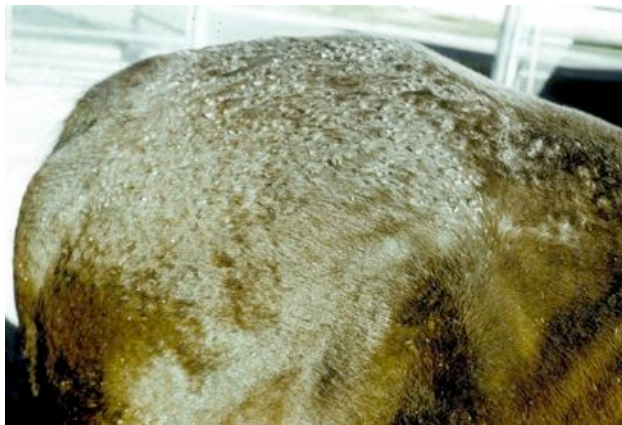


Fig. 1: Severe case of rain scald showing matting of hairs overlying exudative skin lesions

What do mud fever and rain scald look like?

Crusts (scabs) develop with or without swelling of the surrounding area. The crusts characteristically adhere to clumps of hair so that the matted hairs come with them when the scabs are removed (Fig. 2). Horses usually resent these scabs being removed as the skin below is inflamed and oozes serum. In mud fever there is often swelling of the pastern and the horse may be lame. Un-pigmented skin (white socks) is more susceptible to mud fever because of the damaging effect of solar dermatitis.



Fig. 2: Paintbrush style matted hair with underlying scabs typical of rainscald

How are mud fever and rain scald treated?

Luckily, *Dermatophilus* bacteria are susceptible to most of the commonly used anti-bacterial solutions e.g. chlorhexidine (Hibiscrub), iodine (Povidine, Betadine). Because the bacteria live underneath the matted crusts, it is important that these are first removed. This process can be painful and it helps to first soften the scabs with plenty of warm soapy water. Once removed, the skin should be scrubbed with an appropriate anti-bacterial agent and left for five to ten minutes. A small, soft bristled nail brush is ideal for this. The area then should be rinsed and dried thoroughly with a clean towel. An antibacterial ointment can then be applied along with a moisture repellent cream such as zinc oxide, Sudacrem etc. Systemic antibiotics (penicillin) may be required in very severe cases.

Can mud fever and rain scald be prevented?

Obviously mud and rain can not be avoided in Scotland! Because the organism is a normal inhabitant of horse's skin and because wet grass and mud provide the persistent moisture for an infection to start, it is difficult to completely prevent mud fever. It is possible however, to reduce both the chances of a horse getting the disease and the severity of the symptoms by making sure the heels and pasterns are cleaned and dried thoroughly each day. A useful preventative remedy involves spraying the area with a 50:50 mixture of baby oil and vinegar after drying. The baby oil prevents the skin from cracking while the vinegar, which is acidic, alters the pH of the skin enough to make conditions inhospitable for the organism to grow.