

# MUD FEVER

## **A winter hazard for horses.**

Mud fever is an inflammation condition which affects areas of the skin (dermatitis) predominantly on the lower limbs of horses. It occurs during the wet months of the year and is principally caused by the bacterium *Dermatophilus congolensis*.

Horses exposed to a muddy environment, or which are kept in a dirty or unsatisfactory condition, are liable to Mud Fever. Once the bacteria infect the skin and hair follicles, the inflammation of both the skin and underlying tissues leads to the swelling in the pastern/cannon region, and weeping of serum through areas of skin. This dries into hard scabs overlying the infected areas.

The organisms that cause mud fever are commonly found in the environment. Making changes to the care of the horse to help prevent the organism gaining access to lower limb skin. Keep the bedding in the stable as dry and clean as possible and minimize the turn-out of animals prone to mud fever when it is raining, and try to keep them from standing in mud as much as possible. Further, dry the legs thoroughly before stabling using a clean towel, and ensure the legs are really clean by brushing out mud and dirt. Over-night stabling gives the legs a chance to dry off and before turn-out in the morning apply a barrier cream lightly over the surface of the heels and pastern of the lower limbs. Fungatrol Cream (Equine America) is a really effective barrier which containing antibacterial agents which help to prevent the *Dermatophilus* organisms attaching to the skin of the lower limb.

If the horse has developed mild early scabbing on the lower limbs it is important to deal with it immediately. If the hair is long in the area of scabbing it should be lightly clipped so that you can get treatment down to the area of inflamed skin. Gently soften the scabs by massaging with an antibacterial shampoo (Fungatrol Shampoo – Equine America) which will allow the scabs to be removed. Be careful not to get kicked when gently removing the scabs because the area can be sore from the underlying inflammation. When the scabs have been removed, apply Fungatrol antibacterial cream directly to the pink area of the inflamed skin.

The scabbing should resolve within a few days if the above precaution and treatment are followed. If this does not occur, and the condition persists or worsens, including lameness developing, then it is important that you contact your veterinary surgeon because the infection may require treating with antibiotic medication.