**The Itchy HorseHonkjsa**

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The season of itching is here, and it can cause severe skin reaction in our horses. Some horses develop hives, welts, or weals and may itch themselves raw, predisposing them to secondary skin infections. Identifying the cause of the itching can be complex, and so managing the itchy horse can be a challenge for owners.

There are many potential causes of itchiness in the horse and this article does not address all of them, rather the most common ones that we encounter.

**Common Causes**

Insect hypersensitivity is one of the most common causes of itching due to biting flies and midges. Horses can develop focal itchy lumps, others develop a more widespread reaction. Some horses can develop quite extreme reactions to the saliva of these insects.

Other parasites that commonly cause itching in horses include mites, lice, ticks and pinworm. Mites and lice are identified in the mane, feathers and down the back of the horse typically. Ticks can be found anywhere on the horse. Be cautious when removing ticks as leaving mouthparts behind in the horse can still induce irritation. Pinworm eggs are deposited around the anus by the adult female worm, and horses are often found itching their tails on whatever they can find!

Allergic reactions to environmental allergens like pollens or dust can induce itching in horses. These can be contact allergies or generalised allergies. Identifying the exact allergen presents a unique challenge, and is often a process of elimination. Referral for allergy testing may be recommended.

There are autoimmune conditions that cause itchiness in the horse, some of them cause seasonal itchiness, others are ‘triggered’ by other allergens and some just occur year-round. Often skin biopsy is needed to get a diagnosis.

**Treatments**

Keeping insects away from the skin is tricky but the use of fly sheets, animal insect repellent and shade can be used. Remove horses from stagnant water sources to reduce exposure to biting midges. Keeping horses clean is helpful as sweat can be irritating to skin.

Topical washes like iodine and chlorhexidine reduce bacterial and fungal load on the skin and are often prescribed. Barrier creams can be very helpful in horses that have damaged their skin itching as well.

Antibiotics may be prescribed if a secondary skin infection is suspected. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories are helpful for reducing the inflammatory response associated with itching. Your vet may prescribe steroids to combat the itching.

Ultimately, treating an itchy horse involves a combination of strategies including environmental control, topical treatments, and possibly further medications. Please seek advice from the clinic regarding the ways we can help you treat your itchy equine!