***Foot abscess***

Foot abscesses are the most common cause of acute lameness in horses. They can cause a very severe lameness and may even be mistaken for a fracture.

Abscesses occur when bacteria make their way underneath the hard-outer structures of the foot into the soft tissues. They may get in through a penetrating wound or through the white line (where the hoof wall attaches to the sole).

**Prevention:**

Regular hoof care. If the hoof gets too long, this may result in widening and weakening of the white line, allowing bacteria a way in. Horses with soft or crumbly feet may benefit from shoeing, especially over the winter, to lift the foot out of the wet.

Call a vet in early. If left untreated, abscesses often burst out at the coronet or heel but they will resolve more quickly if they can be drained from below. Once they burst out at the top of the hoof, the structure of the hoof has been damaged from the sole to the coronary band.

 Vaccinate against tetanus. The bacteria that cause tetanus can grow in hoof abscesses, so make sure your horse is covered, ideally before an abscess occurs.

**Treatment:**

Effective drainage is the key to success. We will try to identify the location of the abscess with hoof testers and then open up the sole and/or hoof wall to allow the abscess to drain. The abscess is then flushed and packed to avoid re-infection. In some cases, a poultice may be required to assist drainage.

After-care will vary depending on the environment, severity of the abscess and any further complications. In some cases, a special shoe may be required to aid recovery.

The outcome of a foot abscess can vary from complete recovery to ongoing lameness if there is involvement of deeper structures. A prompt assessment is often the best way to get on top of these foot problems, so please seek veterinary advice early.