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Monday, 22 November 2010 01:54

KAM Tip of the Week: There Is Fungus Among Us

KAM Animal Services

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Dermatophytosis, a fungal skin infection, is common in horses. Fungi live in the environment (dirt, mud, shavings, straw and hay) and on the hair and skin of most horses.



When the horse's immune system is weakened and/or the protective defenses of the skin are compromised a pathological infection occurs. "Scratches"

refers to a skin problem on the legs of horses caused by a fungus (and sometimes complicated by bacteria) where the skin becomes crusted, scabby and thickened, creating bumps and open sores.

Chronic repeated excess moisture is one of the most common causes. This may be from hot humid weather, standing in wet grass or mud, getting frequent baths, cold hosing/soaking feet and legs, the application of liniments, wearing leg wraps and sweating under them, or any combination of things.

Another cause is contact dermatitis from chemicals applied to the horse or found in the footing, bedding, or pasture that creates an inflammatory response. Horses eating certain plants, such as red clover and alfalfa, may exhibit photosensitive reactions and get sunburn on the white/pink areas of their body leading to infections. Here are some ideas to help:

Prevention by keeping the legs clean and dry while avoiding mud, wet grass and irritants. Use sunblock on sensitive areas.

Clip the hair to improve drying and aid in removing scabs and applying medications.

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Wash the infected areas with an antibacterial/antifungal shampoo, allowing at least 10-15 minutes contact time to soften the scabs and kill the organisms before rinsing. Then dry the area.

Most prescription topical medications will contain an antibiotic, an antifungal and a steroid (to reduce inflammation). Silver sulfadiazine and Desitin are often helpful.

Severe cases may require oral or injectable medications as well. Consult your veterinarian.

KAM
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