

Baker & McVeigh Equine Hospital CAPE (PTY) LTD

Dr. J. McVeigh B.V.M.S M.R.C.V.S. - Principal
Dr. A.G Cameron B.V.M.S M.R.C.V.S - Partner
Dr. D. Timpson B.V.Sc M.R.C.V.S - Partner
Dr. A. Clements B.V.Sc Cert.E.S (Orth) M.R.C.V.S - Partner
Dr. E. Alsop B.V.Sc Cert.E.M (Intmed) M.R.C.V.S
Dr. B. Gillespie B.V.Sc BSc



P.O Box 55290, Sunset Beach, 7435

Tel: +27 (21) 552 3450

Fax: +27 (21) 552 3225

Email: cape@mcveigh.co.za

Website: www.bakermcveigh.com

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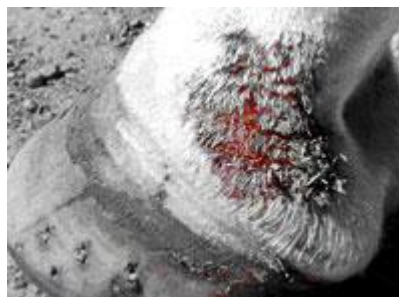
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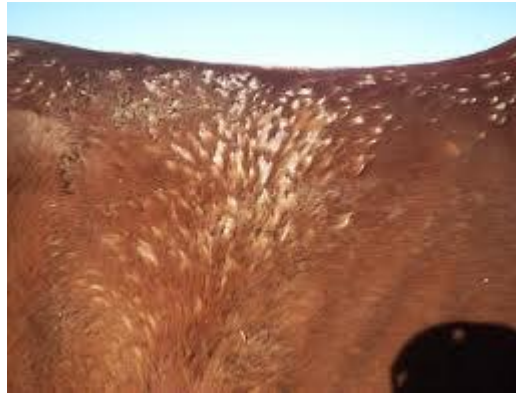
MUD FEVER

Mud fever, or greasy heel as it also known can be a frustrating condition, affecting horses in the wetter winter months. Its incidence can be much reduced by following some simple management guidelines and inspecting your horse's legs on a twice daily basis.

What is mud fever?

Mud fever is a disease most commonly seen on the heels, pasterns, coronary bands and fetlocks of horse's limbs. It can affect other parts of the body and when seen over the flanks is often referred to as rain rot or rain scald. The skin becomes inflamed and starts to ooze serum, with scab and crust formation and skin cracking. In severe cases, the limbs may swell and lameness may develop. Thin skinned horses and pink skinned areas are more prone to the condition. Horses with large amounts of feathers are often more prone as the feathers provide an ideal environment for some of the causative agents to hide and grow in.





Rain scald

What causes mud fever?

It used to be thought that mud fever was caused by a single organism called *Dermatophilus Congolensis*, but this is now known not to be true. Mud fever can be caused by a **variety of bacteria**, and although there will often be one dominant type, there are usually **mixed infections**. **Fungal** involvement can also occur. Staphylococcal and Streptococcal bacteria are often involved as they normally live on healthy skin. As well as infectious agents, there are certain **environmental factors** that lead to mud fever. The skin also needs to become damaged to allow the bacteria entry to the underlying layers to cause damage. The skin is often damaged by prolonged periods of being wet and muddy and especially in the Western Cape, with sand abrasion damage. Staphylococcal infections are usually very painful whereas dermatophilus has less pain and less exudate/serum ooze. Fungal infections are very smelly and produce a lot of exudate.

To reach a definitive diagnosis, skin biopsies and cultures may need to be taken, but these are rarely required. There are other much less common diseases that can resemble mud fever, so if your horse's mud fever is not clearing up with correct management, then veterinary advice should be sought.



Skin biopsies being taken



Papilloma virus

Some of the causes/agents involved in mud fever are contagious and so can spread from horse to horse, if conditions allow.

How can I treat my horse for mud fever?

The most effective treatment is a combination of removing the cause and treating the skin damage. Some horses are very painful and may require sedation by your vet just to allow thorough clipping of hair and cleaning of the area.

While being treated for mud fever your horse should be stabled to prevent him from coming into further contact with the wet or mud. Make sure the bedding in the stable is dry, clean and non-irritant.

All the hair around the affected area should be clipped. Be careful not to break the skin when clipping the affected area otherwise further bacteria will penetrate the skin and cause further infection.

The legs should be thoroughly cleaned with an antiseptic shampoo (weak hibiscrub or pevidone iodine or savlon), using WARM water. This will soften any scabs which need

to be removed. All the scabs must be removed so that the treatment used can reach the affected skin - this procedure should be carried out over a period of a few days; removing the scabs a little at a time will cause less trauma to the underlying skin.

The legs should then be thoroughly dried. Do not vigorously rub, rather pat dry, or better still use a hairdryer. If using a towel, use it once then wash it otherwise the bugs will live on the towel and when you use it the next day, you will be re applying the bad bugs again!

The infected skin should be treated with a cream/solution formulated to attack the bacteria that causes mud fever. There are several preparations available. Please speak to your vet for the best one suited to your horse.

In severe cases antibiotic treatment may be needed, if this is the case you should call your vet. But remember the use of antibiotics will not make up for poor management.

Once the mud fever has been treated and the bacteria has been destroyed, the affected area must continue to be protected while new skin and hair grows. This process may take a while and the skin may remain tender during this period, it is advisable to apply a soothing cream, eg zinc and castor oil to ease this.

Will mud fever come back once it's been treated?

If your horse is prone to mud fever it is likely that it will recur if your horse is exposed to wet and muddy conditions again. Ideally you should clean your horse's legs and allow them to dry out on a daily basis to prevent it from coming back. Consider using a protectant cream also.

