



'Want not, Rain Rot'

'Rain Rot' in Horses

By Michelle E. Twilla, DVM

Cooler weather is approaching and many of our horses have begun to grow their winter coats. This is an excellent time to assess what the hot, rainy season has done to the health of your horse's skin and coat. You may be familiar with the term "rain rot" or "rain scald" as a cause for skin disease in horses. Rain rot is commonly mis-termed as a fungal infection but it is rather a bacterial infection of the skin caused by the organism *Dermatophilus congolensis*. This bacteria is a normal inhabitant of the skin and found in our soil. *D. congolensis* only becomes problematic when the skin is compromised by wet, hot, humid conditions or skin that is traumatized by biting insects, grooming, clipping or tack. When the once dormant bacteria become activated they incite an inflammatory reaction in the skin that results in painful, non-itchy, crusts, and scabs often referred to as "pain brush lesions". The scabs are primarily seen on the back of the horse (areas exposed to the elements) and when removed a yellow-green pus may be seen. Rain rot or *Dermatophilosis* can often be diagnosed just by appearance and distribution of the lesions, however, a definitive diagnosis can be made by having your veterinarian perform a skin scrape or by culturing the bacteria. Most cases of rain rot will resolve without treatment, however, it is beneficial to treat minor cases to prevent

the spread and worsening of the skin infection and limit the risk of other horses becoming infected.

Treatment involves thorough, gentle grooming to remove the crusts. Antimicrobial shampoos are used to soften the crusts and promote their removal. Your veterinarian can give you recommendations for the best shampoo and the frequency in which to bathe your horse based on the severity of the condition. In rare cases your veterinarian may need to prescribe systemic antibiotics to resolve deeper, more chronic infections. Remember to properly dispose of the crusts to limit the spread to other animals as the bacteria reside in the crusts themselves.

Methods of preventing rain rot include good hygiene practices with frequent grooming using clean brushes, limiting exposure to environmental risks such as rain and biting insects, and using separate tack and grooming tools for those horses that are infected. This can be achieved by providing a stall or other shelter during inclement weather. Fitting your horse with a fly sheet will reduce his/her exposure to pesky insects. Remember to thoroughly clean your clipper blades between horses as this is an easy way to transmit *Dermatophilosis* and other bacterial skin infections to other horses.

Contact Brandon Equine Medical Center at 813-643-7177 or email info@brandonequine.com with any questions regarding this topic.

This article originally appeared in Horse & Pony magazine in January 2014 and is reprinted with their permission.