

Animed Equine Newsletter

Spring 2016

Animed Equine Team

MiHorse Club

We have relaunched our Equine Health Plan

Whether you are heading towards the Olympics or just simply enjoy time together hacking out, you and your horse rely on each other. Let us give you the reassurance that your horse is fit and healthy to carry you safely.

For just £9.99 a month, you can ensure your horse's health is fully protected all year round.

PLUS MiHorse Club is the only club where you save money with your vet, with a 10% discount on all veterinary treatment!

Look at some of the great benefits you receive by joining MiHorse Club.

- 10% off all veterinary treatments **including medicines**
- Annual Vaccination of flu and/or tetanus plus free visit at time of vaccination
- General health examination plus vet report
- Full dental examination and routine floating (plus sedation at a fixed price if required)
- Two faecal worm egg counts plus discounted wormers
- Multi horse discount for additional horses
- Discount on Primary and EHV vaccinations if required
- Discount of 20% on lifetime care medicines* for arthritis or respiratory disease

See our Website for further details:
<http://animedvets.co.uk/MiHorse-Club.htm>

or phone us on 01329 833112

This scheme is superseding our current HHC scheme
*CVS reserves the right to change lifetime medicines

Client Evening Tuesday 22nd
March – see below ...

Management of Sweet Itch and other Summer Allergies



It is thought that over 50,000 horses in the U.K. suffer from skin allergies in the spring and summer each year. Some breeds of horse are genetically more prone to allergies than others, for example, Icelandic and cob type ponies.

There are a number of causes of these allergies, for example: feed hypersensitivity, nettle stings, exposure to tree or grass pollens, and most commonly insects, in particular the midge, otherwise known as 'sweet itch'. This disease is caused by hypersensitivity reaction to the saliva from insect bites and results from an excessive response by the animal's immune system. In the process of repelling invading insect saliva, the horse attacks some of its own skin cells 'by mistake', producing histamine. The result is swelling and intense itching of the skin.

In the UK several species (of the 1,000 or so that exist) of the *Culicoides* midge and, to a lesser extent, the larger, hump-backed *Simulium Equinum*, a member of the blackfly family, are responsible. Each has a preferred feeding site; *Culicoides* tend to be body feeders and the *Simulium* ear feeders.

Just like with people suffering an allergic skin reaction, the desire to itch and rub at the affected site is intense. Consequently the horse will start to rub and chew at the area, which can then become infected making the problem even worse. Manes, tails and under the belly are most commonly affected, although the horse can be itchy or 'pruritic' anywhere on the body. The more often that a horse is bitten by midges, the worse the reaction becomes. Some horses can become rather debilitated throughout the spring and summer months and subsequently become very miserable.

Diagnosis of sweet itch is generally made on the basis of the clinical signs and time of year. Skin scrapes and skin biopsies can rule out the presence of mites or other parasites, or bacterial/fungal infection. In horses suffering from allergic skin disease, where the allergen is not obvious, then intradermal skin testing can be carried out to determine what it is the horse is allergic to. There is also a blood test that can be done, although this is a less accurate test.

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There are currently no specific 'cures' for sweet itch, and therefore management of the condition needs to be life long, aiming to most importantly prevent exposure to midge bites (or other allergens) in the first place, as well as treating the symptoms and helping the body's own immune system and skin health.

Management Options:

1. Adapt the environment.

- Midges like to breed on wet land, near water sources, and near woodland. Susceptible horses should be removed from these conditions where possible. A windy hillside is ideal for keeping midges away!

- Midges are most active at dawn and dusk. Keeping horses away from midges at these times is important.

2. Keeping midges away from the horse.

- Putting a full body blanket including neck and belly on your horse, such as a Boett rug, when out at grass will prevent the midges from biting; usually the rug needs to be worn 24/7.

- Stable your horse from 4pm – 8am in the summer months (avoid dusk till dawn grazing).

- Fitting a fly screen on the stable door can protect horses against midges entering the stable.

- Putting a fan in the stable will create air movement – midges cannot fly against a wind stronger than 5m.p.h.

3. Fly repellents and insecticides.

- There are many types of fly repellents available from vets and saddlers some are more effective than others. You should find one that suits you and your horse best. We recommend regular application of a repellent such as Switch, containing DEET, and an insecticide such as Deosect.

4. Oils and Greases.

- Midges don't like to bite through layers of oil. Oils such as citronella oil, garlic oil and tea tree oils, and Avons 'skin so soft' spray can be helpful to provide barrier protection against the biting midges. Lotions will also have a cooling effect on the skin, but ensure you patch test first.

5. Antihistamines.

- Piriton and other types of antihistamine tablets can be given to horses, but their effects are very variable, and they don't usually stop the itch.

6. Veterinary "rescue" therapy.

- Despite all the best efforts at prevention some horses still succumb to sweet itch and require "rescue" therapy from the vet. This is usually in the form of a drug called, prednisolone (a type of steroid). Prednisolone is very effective at decreasing the itching associated with sweet itch. It acts by "dampening down" the immune system slightly in order to prevent this hyper-reactivity reaction towards the midge saliva. We try to use it at the lowest possible dose, and only when necessary to prevent the occurrence of sweet itch, because in some instances, usually at very high doses, it has been associated with an increased risk of laminitis.

7. Immunotherapy

A sweet itch 'vaccine' was trialled in this country a few years ago, aimed to stimulate the horse's own immune system and prevent it responding so inappropriately to midge bites. This is known as immunotherapy. There is no licenced vaccine as a result of the trial, due to the huge variability in the numbers of species of midge that horses could be allergic to. However such immune system modifying 'vaccines' or 'immunotherapy' may well be an option in the future against sweet itch, and currently, for horses with proven allergies to allergens other than midge bites, then immunotherapy injections may be a possible treatment option following intradermal skin testing.

For more information regarding summer allergies, intradermal skin testing, and allergy treatment, please contact us at the hospital.

Alex Erskine BVetMed BSc MRCVs

We are holding a

[Client Open Evening on Tuesday 22nd March](#)

- a tour of the Equine Unit
- Talk on Worming by Jo Dyson
- A brief update on MiHorse Club by David Langrish

Please call the equine office for details and tickets

Your Equine Vet Team



Susannah Denton BVSc MRCVS



Alex Erskine BVetMed BSc MRCVS



Jo Dyson BVSc Cert EM (Int Med) MRCVS



David Langrish BVMS MRCVS