



Northeast Pennsylvania Equine Clinic, L.L.C.

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PROBLEM WITH RAINSCALD?

Rainscald, rain rot or mud fever are common names for the bacterial skin disease, dermatophilosis, pronounced (derma-tah-fill-oh-sis). The two most important factors in the development of the disease are moisture and skin damage. High intensity rainfall and/or saturation for several days duration damages the skin and makes it susceptible to the bacteria which causes rainscald. Skin damage can also be caused by biting insects and prickly vegetation. Other possible predisposing factors to this disease include poor nutrition, poor grooming, stress, other disease or a compromised immune system.

Typically a horse with rainscald will have small tufts of hair matted together embedded in thick crusts or scabs. In the healing phase, there will be dry crusts, scaling and hair loss resembling the fungal infection dermatophytosis or “ringworm”. Dermatophilosis is commonly found over the back and hips, sometimes on the face and neck and often on the lower legs where it is sometimes called mud scratches or greasy heel. Other skin diseases resembling rainscald include staphylococcal folliculitis, mange and pemphigus foliaceus. Cases not readily responding to treatment for rainscald should be examined by a veterinarian.

Since the bacteria causing rainscald are multiplying *under* the scabs, it is critical that the scabs be removed, exposing these anaerobic bacteria to air and topical treatment. Scab removal can be painful and sometimes is best done with the aid of an analgesic tranquilizer. Scab removal is best done over a few treatment sessions using warm water and povidone iodine (Betadine) surgical scrub. Work the scabs off with the fingers or a small brush and leave the scrub on for 10 minutes or so to kill the bacteria. Clippers can be very helpful in removing the scabs especially on the legs after they have been softened with warm water and lathered up scrub. Keeping your horse dry is very important as well as *not* putting on *any* oil base ointments or Vaseline. Following scab and loose hair removal, you may wipe on povidone iodine or chlorhexidine solution or diluted White Lightning. To activate White Lightning mix 3oz White Lightning plus 3oz white vinegar then add enough water in a plastic jug to make 1 gallon. Chlorhexidine in spray or water soluble ointment form is also effective. Antibiotics are very helpful with severe cases of dermatophilosis. Needless to say, the medicated bathing of a horse with rainscald is much more difficult in the winter when the hair coat is longer and thicker and when the horse (and you!) can suffer from the chill. Best to get this problem resolved before it spreads further over your horse’s body and to other animals!