



## Mud Rash

### ***What is mud rash?***

Mud rash – also known as mud fever - is the most common skin infections of horses. It is caused by the bacterium *Dermatophilus congolensis*, which is also responsible for rain scald. Infection results from prolonged wet conditions, which activate dormant bacteria present in mud and also weaken the skin's natural barrier defences.

### ***What are the signs of infection?***



Mud rash is characterised by loss of hair and crusting or scabbing of the skin. Affected areas are those that get wet and are in contact with mud, i.e.

the lower leg. The condition is often worse where the skin is white or pink, and especially in horses with sparsely haired legs.

Some horses tolerate mud rash well whereas others may be lame, with painful swelling of the legs. Scabs will come away with a clump of hair, leaving behind an area of ulcerated skin often covered in thick, yellowy discharge.

### ***How is mud rash routinely treated?***

Since mud rash is a bacterial infection it responds well to treatment with antiseptic

washes such as *Hibiscrub* or *Betadine*, or antibacterial shampoos like *Malaseb*.

The key consideration is to ensure that the antiseptic actually reaches the infection; the bacteria hide under scabs and simply scrubbing without first removing any scabs will not be effective.

1. First remove all crusting and scabs by gently brushing. If this does not work soften them by washing with warm *Hibiscrub* and then applying nappy or udder cream once daily for several days.
2. A horse with densely haired legs should be clipped to gain access to the scabs.
3. Once the scabs have been removed, lather the skin once daily with dilute *Hibiscrub* or *Betadine*, or *Malaseb* shampoo. Leave for 10 minutes, rinse off and dry the skin using a soft towel (patted rather than rubbed over sore areas) or a hair dryer on a low heat setting.



4. Then apply a barrier cream to the skin. We recommend *FiltaBac*, which is also antibacterial, or you could use zinc and castor oil, nappy or udder cream, or Sudocrem.

### **What if this doesn't work?**



In more resistant cases it may be necessary to apply an antibacterial cream after washing to help eliminate the infection. *Flamazine* is most commonly used for this purpose and should be applied after washing the skin. New treatments are also available and we have experienced success with both *Bactroban* and *PanOxyl*, which have been developed to treat skin infections in humans. Horses with very widespread mud rash and rain scald can also benefit from a course of oral or injected antibiotics.

### **How can I prevent mud rash recurring?**



The key to preventing mud rash is to try and keep the legs clean and dry. Mud should be washed from the lower legs once a day as this will remove the source of bacteria. This may not be necessary if your horse has heavily feathered legs, as the dense hair coat protects the skin. Any bare or sore patches of skin should be protected by applying a barrier cream prior to turn-out and again after washing mud off.



Turn-out boots and 'mud chaps' can also be used to keep the lower leg clean and dry, but you need to watch that these fit properly and do not rub the skin. It is important to keep the insides clean, as any mud can be rubbed into the skin. Some horses' legs can also get 'sweaty' under chaps, creating rather than solving a problem.

### **And finally, don't despair...**

Individual horses vary in their susceptibility to mud rash and their response to treatment. The fact that there are so many different treatments reflects the fact that no single therapy is appropriate for all horses. But, with patience and veterinary advice, mud rash is always treatable and can be effectively prevented from recurring.