



## June 2025

# Allergic skin disease

Allergic skin disease is an excessive response to an allergen that would otherwise be harmless resulting in inflammation and irritation to the skin. The allergen can be a substance that has touched the horse's skin, been consumed by the horse or been in the environment. One of the most common is sweet itch, an allergy to midges.

Allergic skin disease can affect all breeds of horses and donkey. Unfortunately, it can have a huge impact on the animal's welfare. It can be difficult to isolate and remove the exact cause that they are reacting to.

### Clinical Signs

- Itching
- Self-trauma
- Hair loss
- Urticaria (wheals in the skin)
- Inflamed skin
- Not wanting to be touched
- Conversely wanting to be itched lots

### Identifying Allergens

It may be possible to identify the allergen looking at the horse's clinical history or doing a food trial. However, this is not always the case so there are two options for identifying possible allergens. One option is to take bloods and the other is to do an intra dermal skin test. Both provide an allergen profile for your horse of all the allergen's they may react to.

It may not be possible to remove or reduce exposure of the allergens for the horse but with that allergen profile a specific allergy vaccination can be made for that horse.

### Treatment

Treatment often depends on severity of clinical signs and the cause.

If the cause is contact the first thing we often advise to do, is to thoroughly wash your horse. If possible, to remove your horse from exposure to the allergen.

We may recommend steroids to reduce the clinical signs either as a one off or short term. However, for some cases, such as those who have previously had laminitis then they may instead be placed on non-steroidal anti inflammatories such as bute. Others may benefit from longer term medication such as cartrophen.

Different creams may also be recommended.

If the horse has damaged the skin, the skin can become infected, then antibiotics may be required.



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### Reducing risk of possible allergens

- Soaking hay
- Slowly introducing any changes in feed or bedding
- Reduce changes to detergents that you wash saddle cloths, rugs etc
- Nose nets may be appropriate for your horse
- Avoiding exercise on high pollen days (dependent on type of allergens they react to)
- Allergy vaccinations
- Potential use of medications such as cartrophen
- Use of fly rugs and fly masks
- Treat any potential parasite infections such as lice
- Use of fly or insect repellents- be aware Citronella can attract midges!
- Skin test new products for 24 hours before covering horse for example new fly repellents or show shine
- Take your own bedding and forage to competitions
- If midge based reaction consider the insol "vaccination" for sweet itch

### Upcoming events

4<sup>th</sup> June- Common Causes of lameness at Summerleaze Vets EX13  
7RA 7pm arrival for 7.30pm start

2<sup>nd</sup> July- Skin and respiratory disease  
Curland Equestrian TA3 5SD 7pm arrival for 7.30pm start

Please RSVP to  
summerleaze@summerleaze-  
vets.co.uk

### What to do if horse responding violently

Call a vet

Sometimes severe reactions can be an emergency, so it is important to get help as soon as possible.

Stay safe, your horse may be quite distressed and may accidentally do you harm. The most important thing is that you stay safe.

### Global warming

Unfortunately, with global warming our equines are being exposed to a variety of insects for longer seasons than previously. For example, midges can be out whenever the windspeed is less than four miles an hour and it is more than 4 degrees Celsius.

