



## CHORIOPTIC MANGE - 'FEATHER MITES'

Article No. 1

- Chorioptic mange is caused by the feather mites *Chorioptes equi*. They are a very common problem on the Wirral.
- The mites live on the surface layers of the horses skin but at 0.3mm in size are not easy to spot!
- The mite feeds on the skin debris and have a three week life cycle, hatching from eggs laid on the skin surface.
- They can live in the environment, off the horse, for around 70 days.
- The lower legs are the most common place for the mite to live, but they can spread all over the horses body.
- Heavily feathered horses seem most commonly affected, but any horse can be infected.



Chorioptic mite under the microscope at 0.3mm long. If you can see it, its probably not a chorioptic mite!

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- The feeding and crawling action of the mites causes irritation, making the horse itchy.
- Stamping, rubbing of legs on the other limb or stable furniture, and biting at the legs are commonly seen.
- The level of irritation is not always linked to the number of mites found - some horses can be made very itchy by only a small number of mites. These horses may actually be allergic to the mites.
- Scabby areas and small bleeding wounds on the lower leg where the horse has traumatised itself, are also a good sign that the horse has chorioptic mites.
- The signs are often worse in winter, presumably because the horses are stabled more and cannot get away from the mites in the environment.



Does your horse break it's buckets?  
Perhaps scratching due to mange is the cause?

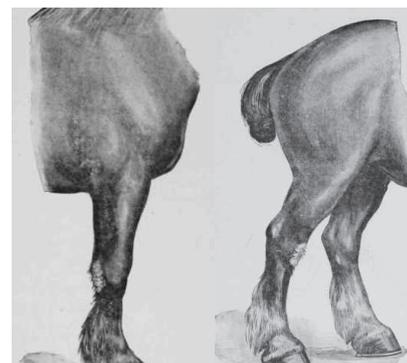
Dried scabs and bleeding grazes on the pastern? This is common in horses with chorioptic mange



### MALLANDERS AND SALLANDERS

Chorioptic mange is often associated with scurfy dandruff like flakes in the skin. This is perhaps the skins natural defence to try and shed the mites. Once the skin starts to do this it seldom seems to stop, even when the mites have been eliminated. As long as the horse is not showing signs of being itchy, owners should not worry too much about the scurf.

Occasionally the scurf can form large crusty areas at the back of the knees (mallanders) and the front of the hock (sallanders). Again, once these have formed, they are unlikely to go away. Attempts to remove them may cause more harm than good. They are often no more unsightly, but can become chapped and painful or infected on occasion. Keeping them soft by using aqueous creams may help if they are prone to chapping



Mallanders (back of knee) and sallanders (front of hock) were a common problem when draught horses were in use and feature heavily in veterinary textbooks of the time.

## TREATMENT AND CONTROL

- Treatment of chorioptic mange is possible, but it may be very difficult to eliminate it completely from a horse - mites living in the environment and on other horses often cause re-infection.
- Re-occurrence of infection is therefore frustratingly common and regular treatments are required for many horses.
- Complete elimination of mites may require treating all horses on the property at the same time and disinfecting stables and allowing them time to rest (at least 70 days).
- Clipping feathers may help in application of treatments but it is unlikely to cure the problem on its own.
- There are many traditional treatments, some can help, e.g. pig oil and sulphur, but others, such as engine oil may be useless and harmful.

## TREATMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE EFFECTIVE

**Ivermectin** -The active ingredient in many wormers such as Eqvalan. Ivermectin wormers given by mouth can help reduce mite numbers, but the drug does not seem to reach the skin in high enough levels to eliminate the mites. Using ivermectin solutions as a shampoo can help but it is messy. Two injections of ivermectin ten days apart, does work well, but some horses suffer very severe side effects, so is not recommended.



**Doramectin** - 'Dectomax' is a wormer injection similar to ivermectin. Although not desired for horses, it is commonly used, seems safe and generally works well. Two injections (under the skin or into muscle) two weeks apart are often given. This is often our recommended treatment.

**Fipronil** - 'Frontline Spray' applied to the legs, this dog/cat flea product will kill the mites, but can be expensive to use due to the large volumes needed.



**Permethrin washes** - 'Deosect', 'switch' etc. can be helpful in killing mites, but do not seem potent enough to eliminate the infestation.



**Lime Sulphur:** - Washes of lime sulphur have been shown to be working to keep mite numbers down, especially if done on a weekly basis, leaving the wash on the legs. Unfortunately lime sulphur stains clothes and horses and smells of rotten eggs!

**Selenium Sulphide Shampoos** - These shampoos will kill mites and reduce scale and crusting if used regularly. Veterinary products are no longer, but human products like 'Head and Shoulders' clinically proven, could be tried.

***If you are concerned your horse has feather mites, get in touch to arrange a Vet to visit to assess your horse and advise on the best course of treatment.***