



The Battle Against Rain Rot

The Educated Horseman: Disease Series



The typical wet and humid weather of Louisiana presents perfect conditions to increase the risk for your horse to contract the skin disease commonly known as “rain rot.”

Rain rot or rain scald (also known as dermatophilosis) commonly is mistaken for a fungal disease, although it actually is caused by a bacterial infection. The bacterium *Dermatophilus congolensis*, which causes the dry, crusty lesions, lives dormant within the horse’s skin until the skin is damaged. Rain-soaked skin – or skin that is broken, irritated or damaged by insect bites or trauma – is more likely to develop the condition. Heavy winter hair coats allow excess moisture to stay in contact with the skin, causing an anaerobic (lack of oxygen) condition that facilitates the bacterial growth.

Diagnosis typically is done by visual confirmation. A horse with its winter coat will develop raised, matted tufts of hair along its neck, withers, back, croup and hindquarters. If not cared for promptly, the lesions will continue to grow and combine, creating scabs with yellow-green or gray colored pus under them.

The most important step in treating rain rot is to remove the crusty scablike lesions and expose the damaged skin to oxygen. This usually is done by bathing the affected area of skin with some type of antimicrobial shampoo (Betadine, Chlorhexadine, etc) and gently removing the lesions with a brush or curry comb. In more severe cases, additional layers of skin may be infected and will require systemic antibiotic treatment.

Rain rot is extremely contagious. Practicing good hygiene and biosecurity techniques are important to prevent the spread of this infection. These are a few of the techniques that can help reduce the spread of rain rot:

- Groom your horse daily with clean brushes.
- Isolate infected horses.
- Clean contaminated equipment before using on another animal.
- Use an insect spray to reduce skin trauma.
- Avoid sharing grooming kits.
- Reduce environmental factors, when possible (constant wet/humid conditions).

Mild cases of rain rot usually will heal on their own, but it is important to treat all cases to prevent the lesions from spreading and interfering with daily activities. If you suspect your horse has a case of rain rot and antimicrobial treatment is not effective, contact your veterinarian.



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References

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