

Factsheet: Feather mites

Chorioptic mange otherwise known as ‘feather mites’ is caused by the mite *Chorioptes bovis*. They are small parasites 0.3-0.5mm in length and are found on the skin surface of the horse where they feed on exfoliated skin cells. Draught breeds are most commonly affected and the mites are generally found on the lower limbs, pasterns and fetlocks.

Clinical signs

- Extremely itchy legs!
- Foot stamping
- Rubbing or chewing at the legs
- Areas of hair loss from biting and rubbing
- Scale throughout the hair
- Inflamed sore areas of skin on the legs from self-trauma

Diagnosis

- Skin scrapings of the legs can be taken and viewed under the microscope. Using a 4x objective the mites can easily be visualised.
- However, sometimes the skin scrape does not always pick up the mites if they are burrowed deep or if there were no mites in the location where the scrape was taken. Therefore, often your vet will still treat on a presumptive basis if there is a strong suspicion of infestation based on the clinical signs.

Treatment

Chorioptic mange can be quite difficult to get rid of as the mites can survive for up to 69 days away from the horse in the environment which serves as a source of reinfection and infection to other horses. There are several treatment regimens that have been shown to work, two very effective ones are suggested here. It is strongly recommended that the legs are fully clipped to enable physical removal of some of the mites and allow topical therapies to work. It will also help to properly assess the skin and any lesions present.

Doramectin (Dectomax) injection twice 14 days apart and topical lime sulphur (LimePlus Dip) (50 ml in one litre) which can be applied with a sponge, 1L is usually sufficient to treat all four legs, repeat every 7 days for 4 weeks.

Topical fipronil (Frontline). A 500 ml bottle of fipronil is usually enough to treat the legs of one horse. Spray to dampen haircoat and skin of each leg from the elbows and stifles down. Repeat twice 3 weeks apart.

Regardless of the treatment used, there is a high risk of asymptomatic carriers, so all in-contact horses should be treated at least once. The horses stable, field shelter, gates, fence posts, tack and equipment should all be thoroughly cleaned to destroy any mites left in the environment which could re-infect your horse or other in contact horses.

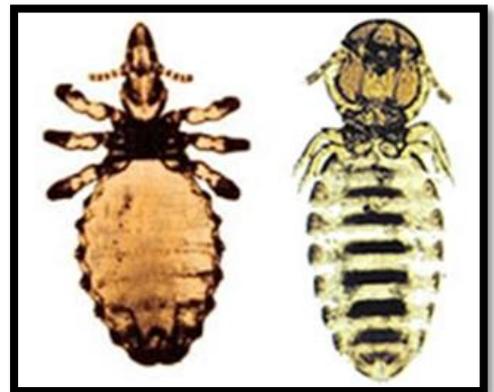


Factsheet: Lice

Lice often cause a problem in the wintertime when horses have long winter coats and are more closely confined in less sanitary conditions. In addition, lack of grooming and rugging make ideal breeding conditions for lice. The two species of louse that cause a problem are the biting louse: *Damalinia equi* and sucking louse: *Haematopinus asini*. They are 3–6 mm in length so can be seen by the naked eye.

Clinical signs

- Itching and scratching
- Self-mutilation
- Areas of hair loss
- Inflamed sore areas of skin from self-trauma
- Loss of condition and anaemia in heavily infested sick horses



Diagnosis

Diagnosis is easily achieved finding the adult lice or the lice eggs (nits; 1–2 mm long) on the horse. Sucking lice tend to be fairly immobile whereas biting lice are mobile. *Damalinia equi* is often found on the head, neck, back and flanks of the horse. *Haematopinus asini* favours the forelock, mane and tail and the fetlocks.

Treatment

Topical lime sulphur, permethrin or fipronil are all effective treatments for lice. Deosect Spray for Horses which is cypermethrin is commonly used. It needs to be diluted and then the solution can be sponged or sprayed onto the horse. Treatment should be repeated twice 14 days apart to break the lice life cycle.

It is extremely important to treat all in-contact horses to prevent re-infection.

Lice can live off the horse for a few days so it is also important to clean the horses stable, field shelter, gates, fence posts and equipment to kill any live lice or eggs in the environment which could re-infect your horse or other in contact horses. All rugs, head collars, grooming equipment and tack should be thoroughly washed.

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