



# VET notes

EQUINE & LIFESTYLE

DECEMBER 09



## Equine newsletter launch

Following feedback from you, our clients, Totally Vets is proud to bring you an equine and lifestyle specific newsletter, to be published and mailed to you every three months.

Our aim is to provide you with relevant, current information on the various aspects of equine health and management. We hope to cater to all facets of the equine industry. Your feedback and suggestions are appreciated, and will help us to keep the info we provide you with as relevant as possible.

**While this first edition is going out to all of you who receive Vetnotes, if you would like to continue to receive the equine newsletter instead of, or as well as Vet notes or Vet mates, contact the Palmerston North clinic on (06) 356 5011 or email [gayes@totallyvets.co.nz](mailto:gayes@totallyvets.co.nz)**

## Equine sarcoids

Lucy Cahill



Above Mixed nodular and verrucous sarcoid around they eye

Sarcoids are the most common skin tumour encountered in horses. They are locally invasive, but not metastatic. This means they do not spread to distant sites within the body, but can grow and invade deeper into surrounding tissues.

There are six different types of sarcoid, recognized by their appearance, which can vary from a small, scaly, hairless area to large, ulcerated, rapidly growing lesions. Almost all involve the epidermis (the most superficial skin layer), with varying degrees of invasiveness. An individual sarcoid may contain a mixture of one or more forms. Sarcoids can also change from one form to another and progression is often unpredictable and sudden.

Sarcoids can be found on any part of the body but are most common around the eyes, mouth, sparsely haired areas (armpits and inner thigh), on the lower limbs, and at old wound sites. Thin-skinned horses are reportedly more susceptible to sarcoids and interestingly Lipizzaners appear resistant.

How or why some horses get sarcoids is not fully understood, but the bovine papilloma virus which causes warts in cattle has been implicated. It is thought that flies may spread the virus, and are attracted to secretions from the eyes, nose, wounds etc. This could explain why sarcoids are more common at these sites.

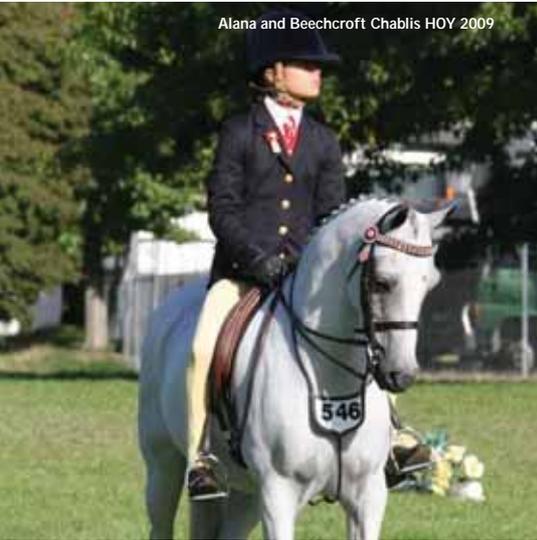
Treatment is often dictated by the particular sarcoid, and they frequently recur despite aggressive intervention. The first attempt carries the best chance of cure, with a 30-40% decrease in prognosis with every subsequent attempt. Treatment options include:

- Nothing – if not growing or interfering
- Surgical excision (sole treatment gives 35-50% recurrence rate)
- Injection of chemotherapy drugs – cisplatin, 5-fluorouracil, or bovine TB vaccine
- Cryosurgery – freezing with liquid nitrogen
- Creams applied directly to the lesion - toxic to cells (5-fluorouracil)
- Radiation (not in New Zealand)

A combination is often used. Occasionally sarcoids can spontaneously disappear.

**If you are concerned that your horse may have a skin tumour, please contact Totally Vets. Early intervention gives us the best chance of a successful outcome.**

Alana and Beechcroft Chablis HOY 2009



## From the horses mouth Lucy Cahill

Congratulations to Alana Clapperton, daughter of ex-jockey Kim for her trifecta at the Manawatu A&P, winning the Champion child rider, Supreme Champion Paced and Mannered pony and the Supreme Champion pony.

We wish her the best of luck as she travels to the Australian Showing Championships at Werribee, with her pony Beechcroft Chablis to represent New Zealand, after winning 128cm and under Pony of the Year at Horse of the Year last season.

This season has seen the arrival of two new Thoroughbred stallions to the area; Alamosa

## Perennial ryegrass staggers

Katie McKinlay

This seasonal condition is caused by lolitrem, a fungal-produced toxin, found in ryegrass pastures. The fungus infests the plants and is commonly known as an endophyte fungus (*Neotyphodium lolii*).

Endophyte fungi grow well in the summer and autumn when it is warm and the toxins tend to concentrate in the lower leaf sheath, flower heads and seeds, but can be found in all parts of the plant. Horses inadvertently eat the toxin when grazing, and with shorter grass and hard grazing, larger amounts of the toxin-contaminated pasture are ingested.

Clinical signs may develop 7-14 days after exposure and are the result of the toxins interfering with nerve transmission. Affected horses can show varying degrees of clinical signs. Mildly affected horses can become more nervous and spooky to handle and ride, and sensitive to sudden movement and noise. More severely affected horses may show severe head nodding, splaying of legs and a tendency to stumble, stagger or fall. Fine tremors are usually exacerbated by movement and hind-quarter paralysis can also be observed.

Diagnosis generally relies on clinical signs, environmental conditions and response to treatment. Recovery is usually spontaneous once the animal has been removed from the contaminated pasture to a 'safe' paddock or yard. A safe paddock is one that contains little or no ryegrass, or has been sown with a ryegrass with a modified endophyte. Endophyte-safe ryegrass seed contains an endophyte strain which does not produce ryegrass staggers (but does confer the advantages of having an endophyte in your pasture such as increased persistence). This can be used to re-sow your paddocks, but

there is a risk that the "wild type" endophyte, which causes staggers could re-invade the pasture. However, a paddock containing plenty of grass so that the horse does not need to overgraze down into the leaf sheath is also satisfactory.

During the recovery period, misadventure is the greatest hazard, so it is important to keep animals quiet and in a well-contained area that is free of hazards such as ditches and dams. Alternative feeds may be fed such as hay and concentrates, but hay made from the affected pasture should be avoided because the toxin is still viable in the hay.

In addition to the above preventative measures, there are products available that can be fed to at-risk animals that may minimise toxin absorption. Please speak to your veterinarian before commencing the use of these products, as some are more effective than others.

**If you are concerned about your horse, or wish to discuss ryegrass staggers further, please do not hesitate to contact Totally Vets, or call into one of our clinics.**





at Wellfield and Fully Fledged standing at Fairdale. With foaling and breeding in the home straight, the Karaka yearling sales are looming, with good drafts entered from the local studs.

The sport-horse season is in full swing, with the annual build-up to Horse of The Year underway. Best of luck to all of our clients attending this year. A reminder that now is the time to ensure your horses are fully vaccinated prior to exposure to horses from all over New Zealand, if you have not already done so.

All race and sport horses should be vaccinated against tetanus and strangles, and preferably also against equine herpes viruses which cause "coughs and colds". There has been a cluster of Strangles cases in the Hawkes Bay region recently. Strangles can be fatal in severe cases, but will cause serious disruption or put an end to your competition season should your horse become infected. Please refer to our website [www.totallyvets.co.nz](http://www.totallyvets.co.nz) for a thorough rundown on vaccination options and protocols, or call in to the clinic for further advice.

The summer dry is upon us, meaning the risk of concussion and impact-related injuries is heightened. Splints, joint problems and shin soreness are all exacerbated at this time of year. Minimising the risks may mean avoiding repetitive or high-impact work on hard ground, using a sand surface, or incorporating swimming into your training schedule. Careful warm-up and warm-down, combined with cold hosing or icing limbs may also benefit these horses.

## Drench resistance - not my problem?

Margaret Leyland

Parasitic worms that are able to survive treatment with different classes of wormer are becoming an increasing problem all over the world, and New Zealand is no exception. If we don't use the drugs that we have wisely, we may find ourselves with no effective drenches.

Over the last few years there have been some changes in the drenches available and updated recommendations for the best ways to use them. As a result, there is some confusion about how we should manage our horses to prevent worm problems. Here are some tips for worm control.

### PASTURE MANAGEMENT

- Reduce the number of horse worms on the pasture by:
  - Picking up droppings twice a week
  - Mowing roughs (the long grass where the horses defaecate) reduces the number of parasites on pasture
  - Co-graze or alternate grazing with sheep or cattle
  - Keep stocking rates low
- Avoid moving horses onto fresh pasture soon after worming. Ideally, move onto fresh pasture when Faecal Egg Counts (FECs – see box) are low or zero

- Harrowing is not advisable as a means of worm control in the Manawatu (not hot and dry enough to be effective)

### FAECAL EGG COUNTS

Totally Vets charges \$13.50 for the first sample and \$3 for each additional sample. This means five horses can be tested for the price of one tube of "Equitak Excel". We need about a tablespoon of fresh manure to do an egg count.

### WHEN TO DRENCH?

#### ADULT HORSES

- Cyathostomins (small redworm) are the most common and most dangerous worms in adult horses
- Worming all horses within the group encourages resistance. It's better to identify and treat only horses with a high FEC
- FECs should be done periodically (e.g. three times a year), or at the highest risk time of year (Autumn)
- Combination drenches containing drugs from at least two different classes e.g. a macrocyclic lactone (ML) and a benzimidazole (BZ) such as "Equitak Excel"; or an ML and morantel, such as "Ammo" should be used as a first-line treatment for horses with epg >200 through the year
- FECs cannot detect tapeworm or cyathostomin larvae that burrow into the gut wall. These should be targeted once a year with praziquantel and moxidectin respectively, in the winter. Available in combination e.g. "Ultramox", "Equest Plus"
- Dose correctly according to bodyweight

- Bot eggs (small yellow oval eggs on the coat during the spring and summer) should be removed by grooming

### NEW ARRIVALS

- Combination drench and then ideally FEC two weeks later to confirm that there are no resistant parasites. In the meantime, it is best if the horse is stabled or yarded, so any resistant worms don't get onto the pasture
- If this is not possible, give a combination drench and then turn out onto the "wormiest" paddock so that any resistant worms that survive the drench will be "diluted" with the resident (hopefully susceptible) worms

### FOALS

- Mares should be treated with a combination drench just before they are due to foal to reduce transmission of parasites from mare to foal
- *Parascaris equorum* (roundworm) is the most dangerous internal parasite of foals from one to six months of age
- ML (both ivermectin and moxidectin) resistance has been demonstrated in *Parascaris equorum* in numerous countries including anecdotal reports in NZ
- Treat foals at 10-12 weeks of age and thereafter when FEC > 200epg. A combination (e.g. "Equitak Excel": abamectin, oxfendazole, praziquantel) would be a logical choice
- Foals develop strong immunity to *Parascaris equorum* at about six months of age, and can be managed in the same way as adult horses from then on

**Please don't hesitate to give us a call if you have any questions about worm control in your horse.**

# Small block banter

## Small block snippets

Greta Baynes

Small block holders should be thinking about fly management strategies for the summer. Now is the time to have your sheep shorn, if you haven't done so already. Shearing will reduce the chance of flystrike by removing dags - you file the woolly jumpers to the back of the wardrobe during summer, so

it's only fair to do the same for your sheep. Signs of strike include wool discolouration, itching, shade seeking, discomfort and poor appetite. These sheep need treatment as soon as possible with a product such as Zenith spray. This product also works well for prevention of fly strike and should be applied now. Remember to take care to observe all withholding periods for these products.

Lambs should be drenched at weaning, ideally with a triple combination drench such as Matrix. It is generally unnecessary to drench

ewes at this stage, but please call in to either clinic for any queries on sheep health.

Cattle and sheep are also susceptible to ryegrass staggers, as described in horses on the previous page. The signs are similar, as is the approach to management. Affected animals should be moved onto "safe pastures" and disturbed as little as possible. There are also products available for cattle to help prevent and manage ryegrass staggers.

**Please ask your veterinarian for advice on these products.**

## Facial eczema

Peter Aitken

*Pithomyces chartarum* is a fungus found in many pastures in New Zealand. As a part of its life cycle, it produces spores which contain the chemical compound sporidesmin.

This toxic compound causes the disease process known as facial eczema (FE) which affects sheep, cattle, alpacas and goats.

Spores are found in the leaf debris in pastures and are consumed by animals as they graze. Once the spores reach the stomach, they are

broken down releasing sporidesmin which is then absorbed across the intestine, enters the blood stream and flows back through to the liver.

The liver is primarily responsible for breaking down unwanted substances in the blood and acting as a centre for detoxification. When sporidesmin reaches the liver, it is subject to reactions by the liver in an effort to break it down. This process however facilitates the release of free radicals; these free radicals then go on to cause liver damage (hepatic necrosis).

As a result, the liver's ability to function normally is impaired, leading to a build-up of normal metabolic and digestive toxins in the blood. Due to the nature of the diet, many of these toxins are photodynamic (react to sunlight). As they pass through blood vessels close to the skin surface, they then react with

sunlight and cause damage to the vessels and surrounding tissues, together with further damage in the liver. In severe cases, complete liver failure can result.

Signs of FE can include irritation and restlessness, skin swelling, crusting and oozing (often around the nose and ear margins), decreased production/growth rates, abortion and death.

Prevention of FE is far more successful than cure. The use of zinc products (available as a capsule delivered into the rumen) application of 'mycotak' fungicidal spray to pastures and monitoring pasture spore counts are the best ways to prevent FE.

**Please speak to one of Totally Vets' large animal veterinarians for more information.**

## Meet the team

Although you may see your own vet regularly, you may not be familiar with some of the other members of our equine and small block team.

**So here they are, from left to right:**

**Back row** - Joao Dib, Margaret Leyland, Holly, Peter Aitken.

**Front row** - Lucy Cahill, Barry Drayton, Katie McKinlay.

**Inset** - Anita Renes, Craig Dickson.

