



WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

Equine Sarcoids and Melanomas

As horse owners, we're often the first to notice changes in our horses' skin—new lumps, bumps, swellings or spots that weren't there the day before. While some skin abnormalities are short term and harmless, others may indicate more serious conditions that require prompt veterinary attention. This month, we take a closer look at three common "lumps and bumps" seen in equine practice: sarcoids, melanomas, and urticaria.

Sarcoids – The Most Common Equine Skin Tumour

Sarcoids are the most frequently diagnosed skin tumours in horses. Although they don't spread internally like some cancers, they can be aggressive, locally invasive, and very persistent - meaning they grow, disrupt the area around them and can be hard to treat.

What are they?

Sarcoids are a form of fibroblastic skin tumour linked to the bovine papillomavirus. They can appear anywhere on the body but are most common on the head, under the belly, around the groin, and on the limbs.

Types of sarcoids

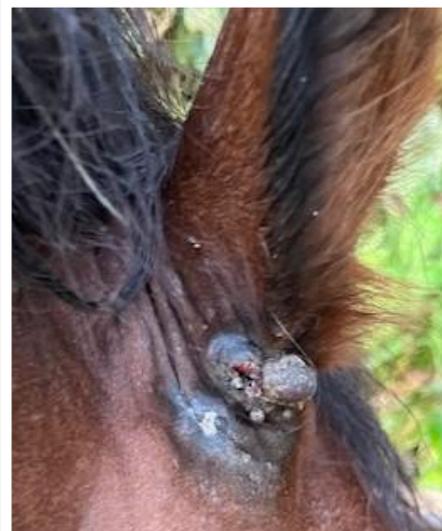
- Occult: Flat and hairless patches, often mistaken for ringworm
- Verrucous: Warty and crusty in appearance
- Nodular: Firm lumps under the skin
- Fibroblastic: Fleshy, ulcerated masses that may bleed
- Mixed: A combination of the above types

Treatment

There is no one-size-fits-all treatment. Options include:

- Surgical removal
- Laser therapy
- Cryotherapy (freezing)
- Immunotherapy
- Chemotherapy creams

Early diagnosis and tailored treatment are essential for rapidly growing, changing or bleeding sarcoids. Veterinary assessment is essential to advise on the next steps for an unidentified lump.



Melanomas – a concern for grey horses



Melanomas are most often seen in older grey horses, with over 80% of grey horses affected by age 15. They tend to be slow-growing but can become problematic over time.

Common sites

- Under the tail
- Around the anus
- In the throatlatch and under the jaw

Are they dangerous?

Most equine melanomas are benign initially, but some can become malignant and spread internally. Masses may interfere with normal functions like defaecation or breathing if they grow in sensitive areas. However most horses with them do not suffer life altering consequences as a result of melanomas and many do not impact them significantly during their life, allowing them a normal life expectancy.

Management

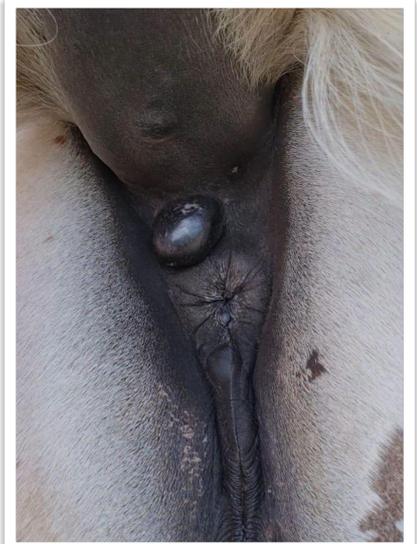
- Monitoring is important - take photos of any changes in size, number or location
- Surgical removal or laser excision can be effective for small or isolated melanomas
- New therapies, including vaccines and immune-modulating drugs, are under investigation and may offer hope for more widespread cases in the future but current evidence is still in its infancy

When to call the vet

It's always wise to monitor your horse's skin for changes. Contact your vet if you notice:

- A lump that grows rapidly
- Ulcerated or bleeding masses
- Lumps that interfere with tack or movement
- Persistent or recurring swellings
- A change in colour, texture, or shape

Lumps and bumps are common in horses, but not all are harmless. Early veterinary assessment can make a big difference, especially with tumours like sarcoids and melanomas. With prompt treatment and a tailored approach, most horses can remain happy and healthy.



If you are concerned about a lump on your horse please contact us on 01328 864444 for further advice.



