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## **Foot Abscess**

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### **What is a foot abscess?**

A foot abscess, (or solar abscess), is a collection of pus within a cavity in the hoof, and is probably the most common cause of sudden, non-weight bearing lameness in a single limb. Other common presenting signs include increased digital pulses on the affected leg, and increased heat in the affected hoof wall.

### **How do we diagnose an abscess?**

The first step is to take a thorough history. We may ask you the following to rule in/out an abscess when making a diagnosis:

- How long have you noticed the lameness? Has it improved over this time?
- Can the horse bare weight?
- Is the horse turned out?
- Has your horse had an abscess before?
- Is the horse lame in one or more limbs?

The next step is to apply hoof testers along the sole of the foot. Depending on the horse, this may cause a pain response which will guide us to an appropriate place to pare out the abscess. Hoof testers and paring are sometimes unsuccessful, especially if the horse has a higher pain threshold or hard, thick soles.

### **How do we treat an abscess?**

At the visit, we will usually apply a hot, wet poultice to the hoof, after it has been cleaned. We recommend this be changed every 24 hours for the first 3-5 days.

In between poultice changes, the hoof can be soaked in a bucket of warm water with Epsom salts to soften the hoof and encourage abscess drainage. We recommend this be done for 15 minutes before applying the new poultice.

We will also advise keeping your horse in a clean, dry area whilst treatment is taking place.

We may prescribe a course of bute or danilon to reduce inflammation and to provide pain relief.

Antibiotics are not usually required in the case of a solar abscess.

### **What are the next steps?**

If your horse has not improved despite treatment, we may need to investigate further. These tests include:

- Foot X-Rays to visualise inside the foot, and to rule out possible fractures and other orthopaedic issues.
- Nerve blocks, to confirm the foot as a source of pain. We may go on to recommend a full lameness workup.
- Blood tests to assess EMS and/or PPID (cushings) status. These two conditions may predispose your horse to abscess. We become more suspicious of these if your horse has had laminitis previously, or has had multiple abscess in different hooves over a short time period.
- In the case of severe solar abscess, we may liaise with your farrier if there has been severe under-running of the sole. They may fit a hospital plate onto the affected hoof.

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## How can we prevent foot abscess?

- Picking out your horses hooves daily & keeping them clean can contribute to preventing abscess formation.
- Regular visits from your farrier.
- Hoof supplements can help to improve the integrity of the hoof itself. We recommend EquiBioHoof which is available in clinic.
- Assessing the condition of the pasture regularly.

## Applying a poultice

### Materials required

- Animalintex/poultice material
- Hot or cooled boiling water
- Mediban(soft padding bandage)
- Vet wrap
- Duct tape or Elastoplast



Please see our 'How to apply a poultice' document for a step by step guide.

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