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Ringworm information sheet

What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a highly infectious fungal skin condition. It is most commonly seen in young horses living in a big group, but it can affect horses of all ages. When infected horses are not allowed to compete or leave the country. Even the slightest damage to a horse's skin can predispose it to infection. The fungal spores spread through direct contact between horses, or through shared brushes, tack and even certain biting flies. The spores are very resistant in the environment, especially stable environments. The fungus can be present on a horse's skin for up to 3 weeks before any clinical signs develop, so other horses may already be infected before any visible signs are noted.

What are the clinical signs?

There are 2 types of fungus which cause ringworm and, as they grow across the surface of the skin, they produce changes in the horse's coat and skin. Ringworm can present in a wide variety of ways, so we advise asking your vet to examine any skin or hair changes. The most common change we see is bald areas with skin scaling affecting the girth region, sides of neck and rug contact points. These changes can present in any shape and distribution, from individual circular lesions to large diffuse areas of coat change. In a few cases a secondary bacterial infection can occur causing a discharge.

How is it diagnosed?

We recommend sampling the lesions and testing for the fungal infection. Historically, diagnosis took a long time but a recent development means we can provide a diagnosis within 48 hours which allows appropriate treatment and management.

What is the treatment?

It is important to note that ringworm is a zoonotic infection meaning it can be spread from horse to humans. Gloves should be worn while handling infected horses. Infected horses also pose a risk to other horses. We therefore advise keeping infected horses isolated until they have completed the correct treatment course and no new lesions have developed.

The purpose of treatment is to limit the spread of infection. Once a horse has been diagnosed with ringworm a topical antifungal solution (available from us) is applied 4 times at 3 day intervals. Sometimes it is necessary to remove thick scabs and debris prior to applying the solution and some horses require more than one treatment course. All tack, rugs and grooming equipment should be restricted to individual horses and cleaned regularly using a fungicidal wash.

Treating the environment using an anti-fungal disinfectant can help prevent outbreaks.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

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