

# Rain Scald

Rain scald is a condition generally found during autumn and winter months and affects the skin of the horse, usually on the back and flanks. It is caused by a bacteria called *Dermatophilus congolensis*. Localised infection of the legs is referred to as mud fever, which occurs most commonly in horses and ponies kept or exercised outdoors in wet and muddy conditions. If the affected area is under tack, then it may stop the horse from being ridden.



## IDENTIFYING RAIN SCALD

- Rain scald can be identified as scabs, often with tufts of hair attached to them. The hair on the scabs may stand up and look like paintbrush bristles.
- The scabs may vary in size and if removed, there may be yellow pus on the skin underneath the scab.
- The scabs can be painful to the horse if removed, but are not usually itchy.
- Long standing cases may have large areas of scabs which merge together. The coat will look very coarse and tufty on these areas. White skinned areas may be more susceptible to infection.
- Mud fever is caused by similar infections of the legs. The horse may be lame, especially if the scabs are around the heels and coronet band. In severe cases, deep skin infection may occur and the horse's leg will swell.
- A diagnosis of rain scald is made by identifying the scabs and sometimes your vet may send a swab or scab away to a laboratory for culture, to try to grow the *Dermatophilus* bacteria.



## REMEMBER

- Rain scald is avoidable with good management.
- It is caused by the bacteria *Dermatophilus congolensis*.
- The condition is contagious between horses either by direct contact or by sharing rugs, tack and brushes.
- It is usually straightforward to treat by keeping the horse dry and using anti-bacterial washes.
- If your horse has rain scald or mud fever once, it does not become immune and can suffer from it every winter.

### TREATMENT

- If your horse or pony has been diagnosed with rain scald, it should be brought into a stable and kept dry. If this is not possible, a waterproof rug should be used. Cases of mud fever need to be removed from muddy fields and kept in a clean, dry stable if possible. It is very important to keep the skin dry.
- Gently remove and dispose of the 'paintbrush' scabs. Remember, the scabs can spread infection of *Dermatophilus*. In severe cases, the coat may need to be clipped out. Again, remember to clean the clippers thoroughly to prevent spread to other horses.
- Once you have removed as many scabs as possible, wash or spray the affected areas with either a chlorhexidine or povidone-iodine solution for seven to ten days. Dry the skin thoroughly after each wash and keep dry until the next application. Application of antibiotic cream may be useful but barrier creams should be avoided until the scabs have been removed as they can be difficult to wash off.
- Wash grooming brushes in disinfectant and avoid sharing tack and equipment with other horses.
- In severe cases, your vet may prescribe antibiotics. Recovery from rain scald may take several weeks.
- A horse will not become immune to rain scald or mud fever. If your horse has had it once, it may suffer from it again in the future, especially in wet and muddy conditions.

### REMEMBER

- Rain scald may prevent you from riding your horse or pony as it will be uncomfortable underneath the saddle.
- You may not be able to ride your horse for up to several weeks in severe cases.
- Antibiotics may be prescribed by your vet in severe cases.
- Your horse may become lame with mud fever.



### Case Study

Sunny was kept out in the field without any shelter or a rug. His owner noticed patches all over his body which looked like sticky paintbrush bristles. His owner called the vet who diagnosed rain scald. Sunny was brought in from the field and kept in a dry stable. His owner removed the scabs and washed the underlying skin with dilute antiseptic solution. Within a fortnight, these patches had vanished and Sunny was able to be ridden again.



XLVets Equine is a novel and exciting initiative conceived from within the veterinary profession made up of independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout the United Kingdom, members of XLVets Equine are committed to working together for the benefit of all their clients.  
© XLVet UK Ltd.

No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

For further information contact your local XLVets Equine practice:



**Penbode Equine vets - Serving Devon and Cornwall**  
**Holsworthy, Devon, 01409 255 549**  
**Okehampton, Devon, 01837 506 070**  
[www.penbodevets.co.uk](http://www.penbodevets.co.uk)