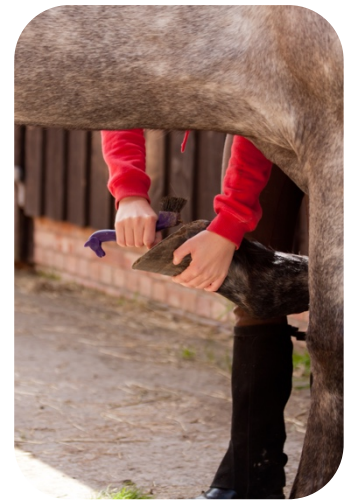


Hoof Abscesses

A hoof abscess occurs when bacteria enters the deeper structures of the foot (usually from a crack or bruise) and pus is produced as the horse's body tries to fight off the infection. This fluid causes pressure to build up within the hoof, and since the hoof cannot expand this causes significant pain. We see far more hoof abscesses during the winter months due to the increased amount of mud and that the horse's hooves tend to be softer, allowing bacteria to enter



What signs will I see?

Often the first sign that you will see will be a sudden severe lameness and pain, the horse may be unable/unwilling to put any weight at all through the leg. In some cases there will be swelling of the leg, increased heat in the hoof and the pulses to the foot will be increased.

Some horses will show variable lameness if the pus is able to escape out of the hoof, and may be very lame one day and much sounder the next.

If the infection has been present for some time, the pus often tracks up the inside of the hoof and pops out at the coronary band or heel.

Sometimes the infection will spread and the whole limb will be swollen, the horse may have a temperature and be systemically unwell.

How is it diagnosed?

The hoof will be examined and hoof testers are often used to localise the most sensitive area. Generally the shoe will need to be removed.

How is it treated?

Once the shoe has been removed and the abscess area identified with hoof testers, a small hoof knife is normally used to make a hole in the hoof to release the pus. The pus is often dark brown or black in colour but can be yellow or bloody.

Once the abscess has been drained it is important to keep the area clean and protected. A poultice should be applied to help draw out all of the infected fluid. The foot should then be wrapped and protected from dirt and manure with a poultice boot or the application of tape.

The poultice should be maintained until there is no new discharge for several days and the horse is comfortable. Normally this takes 5-7 days. Following this the hole may need to be packed to prevent dirt entering the hole and re-infecting the hoof. This is often achieved with commercial hoof putty or with iodine soaked cotton wool.



Painkillers are often given as they will make the horse more comfortable and put more weight on the leg, which encourages draining of the abscess. Antibiotics are very rarely indicated as they do not reach the abscess very well and often actually prolong the course of the abscess.

The outlook for horses following a foot abscess is generally excellent, providing that prompt treatment is sought. In some cases abscesses can recur, or require further paring. Rarely further investigation will be required if the abscess is difficult to find, or there is a suspicion that deeper structures may be involved.

What if no abscess is found or the horse stays uncomfortable?

Occasionally it can be very difficult to find a hoof abscess, if it is very deep within the foot or in an unusual area. In these cases radiography is usually recommended to identify the site and rule out any other causes of the lameness. Other common causes of pain from the foot include fracture of the pedal bone itself, laminitis and pedal bone infection (where the infection spreads to involve the bone)

How can I decrease the chance of my horse having an abscess?

Regular trimming and good hoof care will minimise the chance of your horse having an abscess.

MKTG/Equine/Collateral/EquineInformation/Hoof Abscesses



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