

Sweet Itch Management

Sweet Itch is the most common allergic skin disease seen in the horse, caused by a hypersensitivity reaction to *Culicoides* midges. Only some horses develop this over-reaction to the female midge bite which is recurrent each season. The signs often first appear at the age of 2-4 years, but can be seen from much earlier.

The skin reactions are highly itchy and the appearance of the horses skin is due to the resulting self trauma.

The season of midge activity varies according to the area and the weather conditions, but can be from March to October.

The management of sweet itch has 2 aspects to consider: avoidance of the midges and reduction of the inflammatory reaction.

The avoidance strategies can include stabling during peak midge activity (dawn and dusk), copious insect repellent, fly screens in stables and barrier rugs (for example boett rugs). Benzyl Benzoate has an oily barrier effect and also mild anti-inflammatory properties.

Some horses need relocating to a field away from standing water as this is the ideal breeding habitat for the midges. Drugs which are used to control the inflammation are usually based around corticosteroids (topically or systemically) and a desensitisation vaccine is currently being trialled by the Sweet Itch Centre. Please contact the surgery if you would like to discuss any of these points in more detail.

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