

Pemphigus foliaceus



There are many different causes of skin disease in horses and ponies, with the most common being associated with parasites and insects. However, occasionally immune mediated skin conditions can occur spontaneously or as a reaction to a drug or stressful situation. Below is a picture of a horse presented to us for excess scabs which had originally started on the lower leg but had progressed rapidly and was now affecting the belly and flanks (see picture on the left).

Skin biopsies are required to diagnose immune mediated conditions and the process is well tolerated by horses. Local anaesthetic and a punch biopsy tool (like a small apple core) are used in several areas to obtain samples which are then sent to the lab. The lab can then determine based on the cells present which condition is causing the skin's appearance.

In this case pemphigus foliaceus was diagnosed. In this disease the body directs antibodies against the cells on the skin surface and in doing so causes blister and excessive crust formation. The mainstay of treatment for autoimmune conditions is immunosuppression using corticosteroids. Autoimmune conditions carry a good to guarded prognosis depending upon how well the immunosuppressive therapy works. However, we are pleased to report that in this case the corticosteroids have worked wonders. The pony is back in full work and as you can see the skin appears completely normal (like in the picture at the top). The pony will be closely monitored to detect any future recurrence. If you have any queries about your horse/ ponies' skin then please call us to speak to one of our vets on 01772 861 300.