**EQUINE SUMMER SORES**

Habronemiasis, also known as summer sores, granular dermatitis, and jack sores are a common parasitic condition in our region. Summer sores are the result of a complex association between the horse, the stomach worm (Habronema muscae) and its intermediate host (Stable and house flies). While the parasite can cause gastric irritation in its normal life-cycle in the horse’s stomach, it usually is of no real consequence. It is when the parasite invades ectopic (abnormal) locations on the horse that it becomes a difficult and nasty condition to treat. The most common locations for summer sores is in the medial canthus of the eye (corner of the eye), prepuce and urethral orifice, margins of the lips or any location that is moist or a skin abrasion exists.

In the normal life-cycle of the parasite, eggs are passed in the manure of the horse and are ingested by larva of the flies. The fly larva develop into mature flies which act both as carriers and incubators of the stomach worm eggs. The eggs mature to more advanced larval stages of the parasite that is then transmitted to the horse when they are deposited by the fly near the mouth and are ingested by the horse. They can also ingest dead flies in the feed to complete the normal life-cycle.

The condition of summer sores manifests when the stomach worm larva are deposited on moist or irritated tissue or mucous membranes. As stated above, common sites include the ventrum, prepuce, margins of the lips and corners of the eyes. Biting flies are capable of transmitting the larva as well. This abnormal infestation of the larva is where the problem begins. This “out of place” larva cannot complete their life-cycle into adult worms and cause serious, intense inflammation. This results in intense swelling, ulceration, itching and the production of exuberant granulation tissue. The lesions grow at a rapid pace invading more and more of the adjacent tissue.

The condition acquired the name summer sore since they tend to regress in the winter time, only to reappear in the spring/summer again even when treated. The parasite appears to go latent during this time giving the owner the false sense that the condition has been treated and managed successfully.

Common differential diagnosis for summer sores include, simple granulation tissue or proud flesh secondary to a wound. Some skin tumors such as squamous cell carcinomas and sarcoids can look like summer sores as can some bacterial and fungal infections.

Diagnosis is usually made based on history and visual clinical signs. In some instances a confirmation of the diagnosis must be made with deep tissue biopsies.

While treatment seems easy on the surface (kill the larva, practice fly control and avoid further infestation) it is very difficult to implement. The usual management includes deworming with either Ivermectin or Quest dewormers (Quest is getting the best results currently). Covering the wounds when possible with a wrap to reduce further infestation and control secondary infection. Anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial medications help with secondary inflammation and infection. Topical steroid use is beneficial in some cases.

Cases that do not respond to this management may require more aggressive treatment such as surgical debulking and debridement. Cryotherapy (cold treatment) with liquid nitrogen has shown some merit as well. Intralesional injection of steroids helps reduce the pronounced formation of granulation tissue.

Antihistamines given orally is used from time to time with limited results. I have found this to be a very hit/miss treatment option.

Strict fly control started early is essential for successful management of the condition. Twice daily stall cleaning, with the manure being removed to a covered container to reduce fly access is essential. The use of products such as Solitude, that affect the life cycle of the fly, have limited success unless all horses in the area are receiving the product. This is the largest limitation with these products in a boarding situation.

Remember, treatment hinges on early prevention and treatment. If your horse has a predisposition for summer sores we recommend early preventative use of either Quest or Ivermectin dewormers. Strict fly management including the use of fly sprays or other topical such as Equi-Spot and aggressive complete removal of manure. The use of fly boots and fly sheets may help with controlling flies as well.

If your horse develops a wound cover it immediately with a wrap or topical medication. Call your veterinarian early for best results in treating or preventing a summer sore.