

PIGEON FEVER

Pigeon Fever is a disease caused by bacteria, *Corynebacterium Pseudotuberculosis*. It has nothing to do with pigeons other than the fact that the affected area often makes horses look like they have a “pigeon breast” due to swelling and abscess formation on the chest. The bacteria are from the soil and thought to be transferred through open abrasions, lacerations, or fly bites.

The most common area for the abscess to form is on the chest and belly, the sheath of males, and udders of females, although abscesses can form anywhere, even internally (less common). The infections are often noticed just as general swelling of the chest called edema. As the abscess progresses a more distinct smaller swelling will appear within the generalized swelling, which is the actual abscess coming to a head. The horse generally does not appear ill, but the area of swelling can be quite painful. Signs you may see are decreased appetite, fever, lethargy, and abortion in pregnant mares.

TREATMENT

Abscesses that form must eventually be opened and drained to the outside. The abscess can take one to several weeks before they are mature enough to open. Hot water compresses, 10-15 minutes twice daily and an ichthammol ointment are two methods that can be used to hasten the maturation process.

Often the abscess will soften in the center just before rupture. They can rupture spontaneously or be opened with a surgical blade by your Canyon veterinarian. Once the abscess is opened and draining it should be flushed 1-2 times daily with a betadine solution. If good drainage is established, these heal within two weeks. Penicillin, if used, will actually delay the maturation process of the abscess and should only be used in special circumstances.

PREVENTION

Prevention is the best defense against this disease. To help stop an infection, or minimize the spread of disease you can implement the following measures:

- Biosecurity measures such as wearing gloves when working with affected horses, isolating affected horses from other horses, and meticulous wound care
- Prevent drainage from the abscess from contaminating the soil as *C. psuedotuberculosis* live up to 8 months in contaminated soil.
- Fly control measures such as fly systems, daily fly spray application, fly sheets for your horse, and fans to create air movement in the stall are ways to help reduce the mechanical transmission
- Vaccinate with the Pigeon Fever Vaccine. The vaccine is given in two doses, one initial vaccine and 1 booster vaccine 4 weeks later, then annually.

