

HOOF ABSCESSSES



Hoof abscesses are a common cause of lameness in the horse. They are due to a bacterial infection at the junction between the underlying sensitive part of the sole (where new sole is produced) and the insensitive sole (the hard part in contact with the ground). A severe bruise can cause separation of these two layers and further trauma to that area can cause small cracks over the bruise causing subsequent introduction of bacteria and abscess formation. Another route of infection is through direct puncture of the sole by any sharp object creating a direct access point for bacteria, which then multiply and form an abscess after the puncture hole has healed over.

Gravel is a type of sole abscess often seen in horses with poorly maintained hooves or horses with a history of founder. In this situation, the white line (sole-hoof wall junction) becomes separated and cracked and allows bacteria to enter. These infections tend to move up the path of least resistance and break out at the coronary band. Its name comes from the common misconception that a piece of gravel itself migrates up the white line and erupts at the coronary band.

DIAGNOSIS

Horses with hoof abscesses are often quite lame. The affected foot often has a very strong digital pulse and is warm to the touch. Hoof testers are used to find the area of maximum sensitivity and therefore the most likely location of the abscess. Usually a tract can be followed down to the abscess cavity and is evidenced by a small black spot on the hard sole.

TREATMENT

The most important aspect in treating a hoof abscess is allowing for adequate drainage by removal of the hard sole. All detached sole overlying the abscess cavity should be removed. Usually immediate relief in lameness is noted once drainage takes place. The abscess cavity is then packed with betadine solution and the foot is bandaged or covered with a boot. Below are step by step daily instructions for caring for a horse with a hoof abscess.



PREVENTION

Good hoof care is the most important factor in preventing abscesses. Regular trimming and hoof cleaning are a must, especially during wet months of the year. If your horse happens to step on a nail or other sharp object, often formation of an abscess can be averted by adequately paring out the sole along the nail tract.

DAILY CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR HOOF ABSCESSSES

1. Once daily remove the boot and packing. Soak the foot in a concentrated solution of warm water and 1 cup Epsom salts. Soak the foot for 10-15 minutes.
2. After soaking, the foot should be dried and a piece of cotton soaked in betadine solution is firmly packed into the cavity using a hoof pick. Then replace the boot over the packing.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 for at least 1 week!
4. Keep horse in a box stall so that they do not remove the boot and to prevent further injury to the exposed sensitive tissue.
5. Administer antibiotics as prescribed by your Canyon veterinarian.
6. After one week you may see improvement at the trot. If horse appears sound, discontinue soaking. Continue packing the cavity should then be packed with cotton soaked in Koppertox or cusol pads. After packing, the boot is replaced and packing is changed once daily for 1 week.
7. After 14 days of treatment, there is usually enough hard sole filling the defect to allow the horse to be put back to use. We recommend that the foot is packed with oakum and the horse is shod with a flat pad for one shoeing.