



ST DAVID'S EQUINE
VETERINARY SURGEONS

ST DAVID'S EQUINE PRACTICE

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3. ISSUE 1

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CLIENT DETAILS

Our reception staff are finding that we often don't have up to date details for our equine clients. Please remember to tell us when you move your horse to a new yard or change your mobile phone number. Keeping us up to date will ensure that you receive the most efficient service. It's also helpful to know where you are and have some directions if we need to visit your horse for an emergency!



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SPRING LECTURE SERIES

St David's Equine Practice is pleased to announce the return of the Spring Lecture Series for 2007

Thursday 1st February 2007

Scintigraphy (Bone Scanning) and Arthritis

Bob Barker MRCVS

Thursday 15th February 2007

Equine Vaccination

Susan Corning MRCVS, Head Veterinary Officer for Fort Dodge Veterinary Pharmaceuticals

Thursday 1st March 2007

The Older Horse—Dentals, Diets and Livers

Bob Barker MRCVS & Alison Reed MRCVS

Thursday 15th March 2007

Equine Fitness

Ben Crisp MRCVS

All lectures will take place at The Maltsters Arms, Woodbury at 7.30pm

Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. If you would like to attend, please phone the equine office on 01392 876622 ext. 2

A donation to the Riding for the Disabled Association will be requested on the evening

NEVER MISS AN ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER!

Currently our equine newsletter only goes out to those clients who have had work done in the month preceding the newsletter issue. Obviously most clients don't have us out every month so if you enjoy reading this newsletter and would prefer to receive it in PDF format via e-mail, please send an e-mail to alison@stdavids-vets.co.uk putting **newsletter** as the subject.

Sweet Itch Vaccine Trial

As some of you may be aware, the National Sweet Itch Centre has been running a sweet-itch vaccine trial for the past 3-4 years. We are frequently asked questions about the trial by owners of horses who suffer with sweet-itch so felt it was time to provide some more information about it for owners who may be interested.

Sweet-itch is a seasonal allergy to midge bites (*Culicoides spp.*) that can be developed in any equine species. It is commoner in some breeds and can be hereditary, but relatively rare in racehorse thoroughbreds. Once sweet-itch has occurred in a horse, it tends to get worse year by year. Although there have been a number of attempts, no successful treatment has been found other than preventing susceptible animals from being bitten. The use of sprays, rugs and stabling during the times of highest midge activity are the tactics most commonly employed to prevent sweet-itch.

The clinical signs of sweet-itch include pruritus (itching), papules, alopecia (baldness), and damage to and thickening of the skin of the mane, withers, tail head and underside of the belly. Pretty much any area of the body can be involved as different midge species prefer to bite different areas of the body. Traditionally sweet-itch season was from April to October, but as winters become milder some horses and ponies show clinical signs all year round.

Some horses and ponies may begin to show signs of sweet-itch later in life having never suffered before. This is usually due to a move to a new area closer to midge breeding grounds (ponds, marshes) and with lower wind speeds. Midges can only travel 0.5 miles and cannot compete with wind.

Over the past 3-4 years, the Sweet Itch Centre has been working with a company called BioEos Ltd to develop a simple and safe vaccine product to work against the immune reaction caused by sweet-itch. The vaccine is based on a suspen-

sion of heat-killed bacilli (a type of bacteria) of a carefully selected species. Horses with sweet-itch have an excessive reaction to midge bites which begins with an intolerably itchy allergic reaction to the saliva of the midge and is then followed by an over reaction of the immune system. The idea of the vaccine is to modulate the horse's over the top immune response to a more normal response to midge bites.

The vaccine trial for 2007 involves the administration of three injections by your vet 2 weeks apart. The injections are followed by 20 capsules to be given by mouth. One capsule should be given every 2 weeks by owners. The Sweet Itch Centre is hoping to recruit a larger number of horses for the 2007 trial compared to the 2006 trial. The intention is to prevent sweet-itch symptoms from developing and therefore it is important to administer all three preliminary injections before the horse shows any signs of the allergy.

I imagine you must now be thinking "What's the catch?". Well, this is a vaccine trial. The results from last year appear to be encouraging but they are not conclusive. The Sweet Itch Centre carried out four trials in 2006

1. A large open trial in which nearly 300 horses participated
2. A blinded, randomised, placebo-controlled trial of 10 injections
3. A blinded, randomised, placebo-controlled trial of 3 injections followed by up to seven monthly capsules
4. A small open trial for horses entering in the middle of the season

Currently, only the results for the large open trial, based on reports from 217 owners, are available. According to owners, the treatment showed success in 151 horses, but made little difference in 66 horses. 70% of owners considered the treatment successful and 30% thought that it was not. Nine horses showed no signs of sweet-itch throughout the season, 22% of

owners thought that the sweet-itch was the same as in 2005, 69% thought that it was improved and 8% thought that it was worse.

Obviously the results of this trial rely on owners reports which are subjective by their very nature. The results of the blinded, randomised, placebo-controlled trials may be the most useful but are unfortunately not yet available.

So this is not a vaccine which can be thought of in the same way as say a tetanus vaccine.

The other catch is that the trial is not free. BioEos Ltd charges £235 including VAT per horse. This is a non-profit amount to cover some of the costs associated with the trial. This amount includes three vials of reagent, three syringes, twenty capsules and a product information sheet. The pack is sent to your vet to comply with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) trial protocol. As the three initial injections must be administered by your vet, you will also have to pay for the vet visits and an attendance and injection fee. Pregnant mares cannot take part in the trial. The treatment has shown high safety levels with few reports of even minor side effects.

As a practice we would like to see some more conclusive results to the trials. However, we are happy for any of our clients to take part in the trial for 2007 as long as they are aware of the costs and the nature of the trial. Sweet-itch can be a devastating problem resulting in some horses being unable to work because of the discomfort it causes. It is therefore understandable that many affected owners are desperate to try anything which may alleviate the symptoms. Conversely, without owners like these, the trials would not be taking place and it would take even longer to find a suitable treatment.

If you feel the trial is not for you and you would like to wait for more results, but you have a horse or pony with sweet-itch, here are our recommendations for making your summer as itch free as possible.

Successful treatment depends on successful fly and midge control. Control measures should be implemented before the start of the midge season. This means insect proofing your stable and your horse. The environment in the stable can be improved by fitting fine mesh over windows and doors and also installing a ceiling fan as midges are less likely to bite at air speeds greater than 5km/hr. Midges are most active between 1 hour before and 1 hour after both sunrise and sunset and sometimes also at night. It is best to stable your horse during these periods. To improve the environment in the field, water troughs should be cleaned regularly to minimise midge breeding. Owners of severely affected animals should consider moving their horses to somewhere at least 0.5 miles from midge breeding grounds as they cannot fly further than this. This tactic can vastly improve the quality of life for some horses although can be difficult in the South-west. Horse should be protected from midges when out by using a fine mesh body such as a Boett Rug as pictured below. Areas not covered by the rug



should be protected using an effective fly repellent and this should also be applied during exercise.

We recommend using an insecticide such as Deosan Deosect once weekly and a repellent containing DEET once or twice daily.

Once your horse or pony starts to show signs of sweet-itch, it is usually too late to just throw on a Boett Rug—you may find it shredded if you don't break the cycle of itching first. A course of corticosteroids can be considered in these cases either while fly control measures are implemented or to break the cycle of self harm.

Deosan Deosect and a fly repellent containing DEET can be purchased from the practice. More information on how to take part in the trial and sweet-itch in general can be found at www.sweet-itch.co.uk or by calling 01352 771718.

FEI INFLUENZA VACCINATION REGULATIONS

Under Jockey Club Rules in the UK horses are required to be vaccinated against equine influenza. This involves horses receiving two injections for primary vaccination against equine influenza given between 21 and 92 days (i.e. 1-3 months) apart. The next booster is then required between 150-215 days (i.e. 5-7 months) following the primary course. After this, a booster vaccination should be administered yearly. Most UK riding, driving and competition organisations require that horses and ponies competing under their rules are vaccinated against equine influenza according to Jockey Club Rules.

However, since January 2005, the FEI has had its own set of rules for vaccination against equine influenza for horses and ponies competing under FEI rules. The FEI vaccination protocol involves regular six monthly booster vaccinations following a primary vaccination course. Horses and ponies competing under FEI rules must have the same two primary injections 21-92 days apart as stated in the Jockey Club's rules but then a booster vaccination must be ad-

ministered **within each succeeding 6 months** following the second vaccination of the primary course. None of these injections must have been given within the preceding 7 days including the day of the competition or of entry into the competition stables.

Due to the difference between the two sets of rules with regards to the timing of the first booster after the two primary course injections (150-215 days for Jockey Club and 150-180 days for FEI), if your horse or pony is going to be or even likely at some point to be competing under FEI rules it would be wise to vaccinate against flu according to FEI rules from the start. If your horse or pony has been vaccinated according to Jockey Club Rules in the past, you may need to start the primary course again in order to meet FEI rules. In either set of rules, your horse or pony cannot compete until 7 days following the completion of the primary course of two vaccinations.

Not sure why we need to vaccinate against Equine Influenza? Come to our lecture on February 15th!

CHANGES TO EQUINE BILLING

The way we bill equine work is changing in response to demand from clients. Currently work is billed at the end of each month. This means that if your horse is vaccinated on the first day of the month, you won't receive the bill for that vaccination until the beginning of the next month. From now on we are planning to send bills out as soon as the work has been charged by the vets. This means that you can expect your bill soon after your visit. The only exception to this is work that is covered by insurance. The bills for insurance work are held here at the practice to be sent with the insurance claims once they are prepared. If you have any questions, please contact Louise in the finance department.

COMPETITION

What is the condition shown below?



E-mail your answer to alison@stdavids-vets.co.uk by 31st March and you could win a St David's numnah!