

Sarcoids

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WHAT ARE SARCOIDS?

Sarcoids are best regarded as a form of skin cancer. They are benign (they do not usually spread to the internal organs), however they can be very locally aggressive and are considered very serious. Horses of all breeds, ages and sexes can develop sarcoids. They most common site for sarcoids are those areas with thin skin, minimal hair covering and a tendency to sweat (such as the face, around the eyes, elbows, inside thighs and groin region).

TYPES OF SARCOIDS

Fibroblastic- Typically resembling proud-flesh, these ulcerating sarcoids have a raw surface that bleeds easily when traumatized. Often pedunculated and usually rapidly growing.

Verrucous- These resemble warts, with a crusty grey surface. Typically slow growing until traumatised.

Occult- Flat, circular areas of hairless, slightly thickened skin. Usually slow growing.

Nodular- Appear as a firm nodule underneath the skin, either singular or multiple. These are usually slow growing, but once traumatised, can exude and ulcerate.

Mixed- Have features of the above types.

Malevolent- Rare, but the most aggressive form in which the tumour spreads extensively through the skin with cords of tumour tissue interspersed with nodules- can spread to the internal organs.

WHAT CAUSES SARCOIDS AND ARE THEY CONTAGIOUS?

It is not known what causes sarcoids, however a viral aetiology has been suggested. There is an implication that flies may be important in the spread of sarcoids over the individual horse, however currently there is no reason to believe that sarcoids can be spread to unaffected horses.

HOW DO WE DIAGNOSE AND TREAT SARCOIDS?

Sarcoids are usually diagnosed based on their appearance and the history of the lesion. Biopsy will confirm the diagnosis, however as this traumatises the sarcoid and may result in a more aggressive lesion, biopsy is avoided unless necessary. Sarcoids are difficult to treat, and while there are many different treatment options available, what works for one horse may be ineffective for another. The common treatments we use include:

1. Local Chemotherapy
2. Cyrosurgery
3. BCG Injections
4. Surgical Excision
5. Topical Cytotoxic

Therapy failure of any treatment method usually results in a more aggressive tumor, and for this reason, we always recommend what we feel is the best possible treatment method for your individual horse, the first time around. While an early diagnosis and prompt and effective treatment is the best overall policy, it is important to recognise that multiple treatment over intervals are required, and treatment is often ongoing, requiring a strong commitment from you as an owner.

