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A Tradition of Leadership and Excellence in Equine Medicine

Fungal ulcers in horses

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Introduction

Fungi are normally found on the surface of the horse eye, but can also cause serious disease following injury to the eye. Aspergillus and Fusarium are two species of fungi known to cause eye disease in horses living in Florida.

The cornea of the horse eye is the outer clear structure in the front of the eye that acts like a window. The most common disease of the horse cornea is called an ulcer. Ulcers are superficial to deep scratches of the cornea and are very serious in the horse as the cornea is so thin. Fungi can cause infection of corneal ulcers. Fungal infections of corneal ulcers are particularly bad in horses living in Florida. Blindness can occur as it is hard to kill fungi.

Diagnosis/therapy

The horse with a corneal ulcer will be squinting, may have increased tearing, and may have a cloudy to yellow cornea. The diagnosis of a fungal ulcer is made with fluorescein and rose Bengal dye staining, scrapings of the corneal ulcer, a culture of the ulcer, and biopsy if surgery is performed. Horses in Florida are at extreme risk of corneal fungal infections. Do not wait to have your horse's eye examined. The earlier this disease is treated the better chance we have of getting the eye better.

Prompt diagnosis and aggressive medical therapy with topically administered antifungal medications, antibiotics and atropine, and systemically administered medications can positively influence visual outcome, and may prevent the need for surgical treatment. Therapy of fungal ulcers in horses can last weeks and scarring of the cornea may occur.

**CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN IMMEDIATELY WHEN
YOU SUSPECT YOUR HORSE HAS AN EYE PROBLEM!!**