

## Summer allergies suffered by horses

### What allergies do horses experience during the summer?

There are two types of main allergic reactions which horses seem to suffer from in the summer months. One resembles the human condition asthma, called summer pasture-associated obstructive pulmonary disease (SPAOPD), while the other looks like bad eczema – often called sweet itch.

### What signs will my horse exhibit?

In SPAOPD, your horse will show classic respiratory signs where they struggle to breathe, breathe faster and frequently cough. They may have mucous production and will not be able to perform to their usual level.

With sweet itch, the classic sign is intense scratching, rubbing themselves on anything they can find. They will usually rub their tail heads and the base of their manes, often until there is no hair and the skin bleeds.

### What causes these reactions?

Although it is believed that certain horses are more susceptible to

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**Andrew Robinson**, of Millcroft Veterinary Group, Cockermouth, on ways to combat summer allergies



these conditions, certain triggers will set off the clinical signs.

SPAOPD is often caused by inhaled allergens such as moulds and pollen, whereas sweet itch is caused by the bite of a midge called *Culicoides*. However, there are many other factors that can cause similar allergies or conditions, including feed ingredients, arena surfaces and an overactive immune system.

### What can I do to minimise the severity of these allergies?

With any allergic reaction, symptoms are reduced by minimising the exposure of the animal to whatever is causing the reaction. In SPAOPD, this might mean stabling the horse in a low dust environment with good-quality wood shavings as a bed and soaked hay to eat.

To reduce the risk of sweet itch, use paddocks away from water courses, with a good breeze and

plenty of good quality fly repellent (or diluted Avon Skin-So-Soft bath oil).

Avoiding grazing at dawn and dusk will also reduce exposure to the midges, although in some cases the only effective prevention is to use a rug such as a Boett blanket, which completely covers the horse from head to tail.

### What are the treatment options?

Unfortunately, as yet, there are no cures for these conditions. However, a combination of management changes and medications should relieve your horses' symptoms.

Your vet might choose to try a treatment such as bronchodilators or antihistamines or might advise a blood test, which is sent away to a laboratory for a series of common tests to find out exactly what your horse is allergic to and how good

their immune system is.

If a blood test has been performed, the laboratory might be able to make a vaccine which is given to your horse regularly to desensitise it and can, in some cases, make them feel more comfortable.

### Will this be a one-off event or will it recur each year?

Both conditions can vary in intensity from year to year depend-

ing on the level of the causative agents in the local environment which will vary, depending on the temperature and humidity.

### What should I do next if I am concerned my horse may have a summer allergy?

Speak to your local vet and ask for their advice. Every horse is different, so it is vital to devise a management and treatment strategy which gives the best protection for your individual situation.



PROTECTION: Boett blanket

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## Disabled riding school members win place in final but need funds to attend

by Chris Webber

TEN riders from a charity riding school for the disabled have won through to a national final but need to raise a further £3,000 to be able to go.

The members of the Disabled Association's Unicorn Centre at Hemlington, Middlesbrough, have qualified for the Dressage and Countryside Challenge finals at the RDA National Championships at Hartpury College, Gloucester, next month.

However, the riders, who have qualified after excelling at a number of heats, need to raise the money to be able to go.

Unicorn Centre yard manager Heidi Hutchinson said: "This is a fantastic achievement for our riders and we are thrilled that their standards improve year on year."

The Unicorn Centre has set up a fundraising appeal to find sponsors to fund the finalists, ponies and their support team.

Transport for riders,

instructors, volunteer helpers, and the ponies, all need to be found, as well as funding for hotel accommodation, food, riding attire for the competitors, and new tack for the ponies.

Anybody able to help should contact the centre as soon as possible. So far, one former volunteer has donated

£1,000, but at least £3,000 more is required to get the team to Gloucestershire.

The Unicorn Centre is a purpose-built centre providing riding and therapy for the disabled.

A lottery grant of £1.2m funded this facility, which opened in 1998.

For more details, call 01642-576222 or visit the website at [communicate.co.uk/ne/unicorn](http://communicate.co.uk/ne/unicorn).



EXCELLENT RESULTS: A rider and pony are put through their paces