



# Home Farm Equine Clinic

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## MAY



You'll notice if you drive through Hurlston that building has started on our new hospital and is progressing well. We are well on schedule for completion in August and looking forward to welcoming you all to us.

The last fortnight's warm weather has been very welcome but does bring with it various problems for our horses. It is now the time of year when our sweet itch sufferers begin to show the symptoms that will haunt them for the rest of the spring and summer.

Sweet itch is an allergic reaction to the saliva of the *Culicoides* biting midge. There are many species of this midge and in recent years the milder winters has meant that the breeding season has extended to include all of summer and also spring and autumn in some areas. Therefore horse owners are finding that their horses are showing symptoms earlier and these are lasting longer than before. The larvae of these flies can survive severe frosts but cannot survive long periods of drought.

Symptoms include:

- Severe pruritus (itching)
- Hair loss
- Skin thickening
- Exudative dermatitis
- Secondary skin infections
- Some horses show behavioural changes and become irritable and agitated

Different species feed in different areas. Dorsal feeding species will affect the poll, mane, withers, rump and tail head whereas ventral feeders will affect the face, chest and belly. Symptoms usually begin in young horses and ponies aged 1-5 years but can occur at any age. Once symptoms begin they are life long and there is no cure for the condition. However it is possible to manage sweet itch and control is aimed at 3 specific target areas:

**Fly control:** Start early on in the season before the flies are very active  
Provide fans in stables as flies find it harder to land on your horse in breezy conditions  
Stable at dusk and dawn when flies are at their most active  
Keep horses away from breeding sites such as ponds, marshes and the muck heap  
Clean your water troughs and provide good pasture drainage (flies like damp conditions)  
Rug your horses up in rugs specifically designed for sweet itch

**Insecticides:** Apply to susceptible areas to keep the flies away  
Products include permethrin ('Switch')  
We recommend our home prepared lotion containing benzyl benzoate

**Anti-allergy treatment:** Promone E  
Corticosteroids  
Anti-histamines

Any anti-allergy treatment should only be initiated once adequate fly control methods are employed and must be prescribed by a vet who can determine which treatment would best suit your horse's needs. We currently have a new product '**Cavalesse**' which has been shown to be beneficial in the treatment of sweet itch and avoids the detrimental side effects associated with some of the other treatments such as corticosteroids. In 2007 and 2008 trials of a vaccine against sweet itch were performed. These trials had varying results and currently there is no sweet itch vaccine available.

Finally it is with great sadness that we say goodbye to Becky at the end of May. Becky has been with us for over 2 years and is a much valued member of the team. She will be sorely missed but we wish her all the best for the future.

Tim, Alistair, Campbell, Becky, Laura & Rhiannan