

## Frequently Encountered Equine Skin Tumors

**Michael Thomassen**

Many different equine skin tumors exist. However, we encounter three of them much more frequently than the rest. When an abnormal or new bump is noticed on your horse, it is highly recommended that a veterinarian is contacted so that a diagnosis can be reached and appropriate treatment can be performed.

### Sarcoids

The sarcoid is the most common skin tumor in horses. A lot of research has been performed on sarcoids to learn about their behavior. They often appear at sites of previous injury or trauma. A bovine (cattle) papillomavirus has been identified in the vast majority of sarcoids. No sex or breed is predisposed to developing a sarcoid. However, up to 70 % of sarcoids develop in horses that are under 4 years of age. Sarcoids are classified in six categories based on the appearance and location of the tumor. Below are a couple examples of sarcoids.



Sarcoids can be very frustrating to treat. Many sarcoids can stay small and unchanged for long periods of time. If this occurs, it may be advisable to monitor the tumor without treating it. Methods of treating sarcoid include: cryotherapy, topical or intra-tumor chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery. Surgical treatment and biopsies should be approached with caution. Some sarcoids can become very aggressive after a biopsy is performed or after surgical removal is attempted. Tumor re-growth after any treatment is very

common with sarcoids and the tumor site should be monitored closely after treatment has been performed so early intervention can occur.

### Melanomas

Melanomas have a strong preference for developing on the bodies of grey horses. It has been estimated that up to 80% of grey horses that are over 15 years of age will have one or more melanomas. The most common area that melanomas develop is on the underside of the tail. Other areas include on the sheath in a male horse, on the underside of the abdomen, and on or around the ears and eyelids. Melanomas can occur as a solitary mass or several smaller masses that come together to form a larger mass. Melanomas often grow slowly.

The preferred treatment method is surgical removal. Other treatment options include injecting the tumor with a chemotherapy drug called cisplatin; an oral

drug called cimetidine has been shown to decrease the size of the tumors



when given daily. Currently, there is a clinical trial being performed on a vaccine that is showing promise for decreasing the size of the tumors.

## **Squamous Cell Carcinoma**



Squamous cell carcinoma is a commonly encountered cancer in horses. These tumors develop on areas that are lightly pigmented and thinly haired including the eyelids, in and around the moth, on the penis and scrotum of male horses and on the vulva of mares. This type of tumor is usually seen as a solitary mass. Treatment options include surgical removal, cryotherapy, topical or intra-tumor chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

## **Conclusion**

When dealing with skin tumors, early detection and diagnosis is important. If you find a bump, lump, or lesion on your horse don't wait, have it checked out. The outcome and treatment time maybe significantly different if diagnosed in early stages. There are numerous other skin tumors that can affect your horse but Sarcoids, Melanomas, and Squamous cell carcinomas are the most common tumors that we see and treat.

Source Consulted: The Merck Manual.

Available:[http://www.merckvetmanual.com/pethealth/horse\\_disorders\\_and\\_diseases/skin\\_disorders\\_of\\_horses/tumors\\_of\\_the\\_skin\\_in\\_horses.html](http://www.merckvetmanual.com/pethealth/horse_disorders_and_diseases/skin_disorders_of_horses/tumors_of_the_skin_in_horses.html).