



SEADOWN  
VETERINARY SERVICES

# EQUINE NEWSLETTER

## 100 YEARS OF VETERINARY SERVICES

### A TRAGIC YEAR FOR CASES OF ACORN TOXICITY

#### Clinical Signs:

Symptoms generally develop 1-7 days after ingestion, and are often non-specific with horses showing colic-like symptoms or general malaise:

#### Early signs:

- Depression/lethargy
- Inappetence
- Mild colic
- Constipation, often followed by diarrhoea

#### Progression:

- Diarrhoea, often containing blood and accompanied by straining
- Dehydration
- Ventral oedema (swelling under belly and/or lower limbs)
- Red/brown urine

If you see acorn husks in your horse's manure, or your horse appears dull and/or off feed when grazing near oaks, it is imperative to seek veterinary attention immediately, do not "wait and see". Early supportive care is the single biggest factor in survival.

As autumn comes to an end and winter draws in, it is a good opportunity to reflect on what has been a particularly bad year for acorn poisoning - likely a "mast year" where oak trees produce an unusually high number of acorns. Unfortunately, there have been several cases of sudden death attributed to acorn toxicity amongst our patients, and undoubtedly several more across the wider New Forest area. We also saw numerous cases that were noticed in time to receive treatment, thankfully most of these survived, but a few deteriorated and were euthanised.

Although tragic and depressing, this serves as a stark reminder of the danger of acorns and oak trees, which we fear is sometimes underestimated. In the New Forest particularly, many grazing pastures will be surrounded by oak trees, presenting a challenge for many horse owners. Below is some information on prevention and risk factors for toxicity.

#### Practical methods of prevention:

- The only way to totally prevent acorn ingestion is to **move horses to low-risk pastures** in late summer and autumn, when acorns are dropped.
- If this is not an option, fencing should be used to **restrict access to grazing directly beneath oak trees**.
- **Manual removal of acorns** should be used in combination with access restriction to clear any areas that are unable to be effectively restricted. This can be done with lawn vacuums, leaf sweepers/blowers or manually raking.



#### Risk Factors:

- **"Mast years"**, such as this year, are years when acorn production is significantly increased, often when a dry summer is followed by a wet autumn. It is important to remember that acorn toxicity can still occur in any year, and precautions should be taken every autumn, regardless.
- **"Addiction"** - Despite acorns being generally unpalatable for horses, there is evidence that horses can develop "acorn seeking" behaviours, even if they have not shown interest in the past.
- There is an element of individual susceptibility, but toxicity is often exacerbated by a **lack of alternative forage**. If grass is limited in autumn, as it was this year, horses are more likely to browse on acorns.

# Sweet-itch vaccine

Sweet-itch is a common problem affecting horses and ponies, caused by an allergic reaction to the saliva of biting midges. These midges like hot, humid climates and, in the UK, they tend to be active from February until late Autumn when temperatures drop. Affected individuals show signs of intense itching, especially of the mane and tail. Persistent rubbing and scratching causes loss of hair and damages the skin, which becomes inflamed, perpetuating the itchiness and entering the horse into a vicious cycle. Management is targeted at breaking this vicious cycle and then preventing it from starting again.

The vaccine was originally developed as a vaccination against ringworm but, in some individuals, it improved the clinical signs of sweet-itch as well. The reason for this is not currently understood, but its off-licence use in affected individuals is becoming increasingly popular.

Horses and ponies are given a course of 2 injections, 4 weeks apart. The course should be given in Feb-Mar each year, before the midges appear and the itching cycle starts, or it can be repeated every 9 months for ongoing protection.

The vaccine cannot be given within two weeks of any other vaccines and cannot be used in pregnant or lactating mares.



If you are interested in using the Sweet-itch vaccine in your horse or pony, please call the practice and ask to speak to one of the equine vets.



## Louisa's synoptic exam

Louisa has recently passed her synoptic exam for her certificate. It's a great achievement and we are so proud of her.

An equine synoptic exam is a comprehensive assessment used for advanced veterinary qualifications, such as the RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (CertAVP), or for some technical diplomas in equine management. It evaluates a candidate's ability to integrate and apply knowledge gained from their studies through a combination of oral examinations and practical assessments, based on case studies or scenarios.

**Well done, Louisa!**

## The story of Sunnyside Louisa

At just four weeks old, Zara's foal developed a concerning swelling under her belly. While initially suspected to be a hernia, Louisa's ultrasound revealed a more complex picture involving a mass containing pockets of cloudy fluid.

Regardless of the specific cause, surgery was critical. With Ludo managing the general anaesthetic, Louisa successfully removed the mass, identifying it as a **congenital cavernous haemangioma**—a rare, benign growth of abnormal blood vessels. Not something we see every day!

Recovery went smoothly, and in a touching tribute, the foal was named "**Sunnyside Louisa**" after the vet who saved her. A fantastic outcome for everyone involved!



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