

AN OWNER'S GUIDE TO LICE

Lice infestation – Pediculosis

Lice infestation is common especially during winter and early spring. It is more common in horses with long hairy coats, old or sick animals.

The adult lice are wingless insects with a segmented body and three pairs of legs. There are two species of lice in horses:

1. **Biting Louse** (*Damalinia equi*); smaller 1-2 mm, rounded head and transverse abdominal stripes
 - Feed on exfoliating epithelium (top layer of skin)
2. **Sucking Louse** (*Hematopinus asini*); bigger 3-3.5mm, long pointed head, piercing mouthparts.
 - Feed on blood and tissue fluid. More common.



Biting Louse

Lifecycle

Lice spend their entire life cycle (20-40 days) on the host. During their life span the adult females lay 200-300 eggs ('nits'). These hatch to produce nymphs (small adults) which undergo 3 moults to become a fully grown adult lice. They spread by contact, for example; via contaminated grooming equipment, blankets, rugs and saddles.

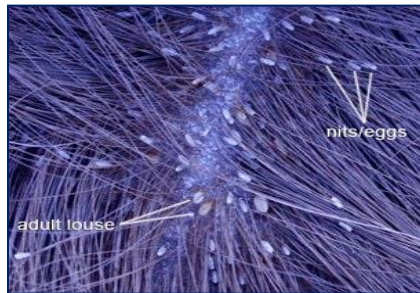
Clinical signs

- Itchiness (Pruritis) – variable
- Poor coat quality with multi-focal, patchy areas of hair loss, scales
- Weight loss
- Anaemia

Diagnosis

Visual identification:

- While the adult lice are visible to the naked eye they often affect animals that have a long haired coat and so can be well hidden. In addition affected horses often have an increased degree of dandruff (seborrhea) which can be confused for lice.
- Haematopinus – large yellow/brown easily seen
- Damalinia – small yellowish specks. Small pale eggs.



Treatment

Treatment is usually easy and effective. Generally two treatments at 14 days intervals are needed and it is important to consider treatment of in-contact animals, as asymptomatic carriers exist. Grooming equipment, blankets rugs and tack should also be thoroughly washed/cleaned.

Treatment options:

- 1% selenium sulfide shampoo (Seleen) and insecticidal shampoo (Radiol) are better during summer month. 3 treatments at 10 day intervals should be given
- Insecticides – Pyrethrins (Dermoline, Sweet Itch Lotion) or Synthetic Pyrethroids (cypermethrin eg Deosect) or Permethrin e.g. Coopers Fly repellent plus, Lincoln Lice control Plus, Switch
- Fipronil (Frontline)
- Doramectin (Dectomax)

**This list is not extensive **



Prevention

- Regular and thorough grooming
- Individual grooming equipment, rugs and saddlery
- (Clipping)
- Treat concomitant disease eg Cushings