

Daniel P. Keenan, DVM

Lynsey D. Makkreel, DVM

Talia M.A. Lin, DVM



RAIN ROT, RAIN SCALD, DEW POISONING

What is Rain Rot?

Rain rot is a bacterial infection of the skin which results in the formation of matted scabs usually affecting the back and rump but occasionally the lower limbs. It can occur any time of the year, but is most common in late summer and fall.

What causes Rain Rot?

The bacteria that causes rain rot is called *Dermatophilus congolensis*. Prolonged wetting and cracking of the skin surface, as occurs in wet weather, allows the bacteria to invade the surface layer of the skin and establish an infection. Once through the skin, *D. congolensis* is spread by the bloodstream, so it can pop out on many places all over the horse's body.

What does Rain Rot look like?

In mild cases, the horse's coat will feel like there are numerous BBs attached to the skin. These will progress to flat scabs containing mats of hair. They will be tightly attached and picking at them is very painful to the horse. As the scabs loosen and can be removed, they come out with a little tuft of hair and the underneath surface is moist and raw. In severe cases the coat over the horse's back and rump will feel hard and painful and will consist of many scabs lying next to each other. If the scabs are gently removed, the horse may be left with a large area of bare, raw skin.

When the infection affects the lower limbs it is called mud fever and similar scabby lesions will be found, particularly on the back of the pastern and fetlock, and the limbs may become swollen. Rain rot may occasionally affect the face.



Horse with "rain scald" over back and rump

Daniel P. Keenan, DVM Lynsey D. Makkreel, DVM Talia M.A. Lin, DVM

183B Bordentown Crosswicks Rd, Crosswicks, NJ 08515

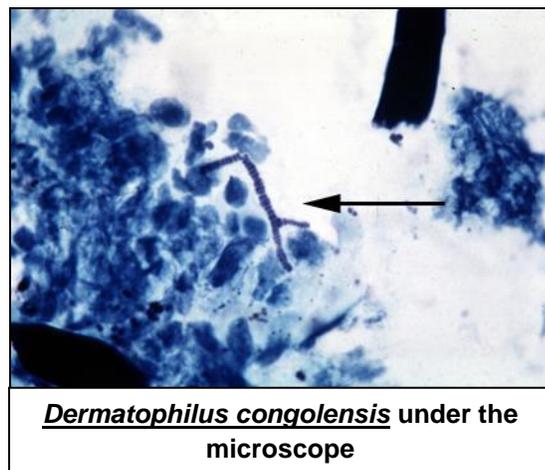
Ph: 609-291-0535 Fax: 609-291-8899

www.foundationequinenj.com info@foundationequinenj.com

Is there anything else that looks like Rain Rot?

It is relatively easy to confuse cases of ringworm and some parasitic conditions of the skin with rain rot. Ringworm tends more to be associated with dry flaking of the skin and when ringworm scabs lift off, the skin underneath tends to be dry and scaly. In some cases of ringworm, the first signs are just patchy hair loss. Ringworm tends to occur anywhere on the body but particularly the face, neck, and limbs. These conditions can be differentiated by a laboratory. Ringworm is contagious to people, but Rain Rot isn't.

Other conditions, such as Cannon Keratitis and Scratches can mimic Rain Rot, but these occur only on the lower legs.



How is Rain Rot treated?

Affected areas should be gently washed with a mild disinfectant shampoo. Letting the lathered horse sit and soak for about 10 minutes will soften the scabs so that as many as possible can be removed without causing excessive discomfort to the horse. Rinse and dry completely. Gradually removing the scabs over several days, repeating the shampooing, and keeping the horse dry will result in resolution of the condition. In severe cases, antibiotics are very effective.

Can Rain Rot be prevented?

As the bacteria multiplies best in warm, wet conditions, keeping the horse stabled, or sheltered during wet weather protects the skin from prolonged wetting and helps to prevent infection. Rain Rot is contagious to other horses, so any brushes, blankets or tack you have used on an affected horse must be disinfected by bleaching and drying before use on another horse. Make sure not to use any tack or grooming gear from an infected horse on any other horses.

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