

Mud Fever – Cracked Heels
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE
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MUD FEVER

What is it?

Mud Fever is a skin condition of horses, generally affecting the lower limbs. While its name would suggest that it is more prevalent in wet and muddy conditions, we have seen it in dry conditions too. If there is a white sock, that may often be the more susceptible leg, suggesting that there may be photosensitisation effects involved in some cases.

The organism *Dermatophilus congolensis* is often associated with this condition. This organism behaves like both bacteria and fungi, making it a complex pathogen.

Mud Fever is recognisable by sore, scabby lesions, generally at the back of the pasterns. Cracked skin will often develop at affected sites. These lesions can be extremely painful and cause lameness. It can be quite troublesome in 'well-feathered' horses. In extreme cases, it can ascend the limb, almost to the hock or knee. Other names for the condition are 'heel dermatitis', 'greasy heel' and 'cracked heels'.

Cases can vary from very mild to very severe and intractable.

The skin condition Rain Scald is also associated with *Dermatophilus* infection.

How does it occur?

This is not well-known. Muddy conditions can predispose to the condition. Long hair on the lower limbs can retain moisture and dirt and predispose. However, the occurrence of the condition in dry conditions and even in some stabled horses makes prediction of factors difficult. When a horse or pony has

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developed the problem once or twice, the pattern will be recognisable and predisposing factors identified.

Is it responsive to treatment?

In conventional medicine, the usual resort is to long-term disinfectant solutions and anti-fungal agents. At the AVMC, we have to see cases that fail to respond to these measures.

We use [homeopathy](#) and [diet](#), to deal with this disease. We use homeopathic constitutional prescribing, raising immune capability and aiding skin health, to aid the fight from within. We also have topical homeopathic preparations, that can be applied to the limb for soothing the pain. Using these basic medical and management techniques, we have been very fortunate in the degree of response, even in very troublesome and long-term cases.

Once predisposing factors have been identified for a particular patient, we set about to manage the patient so that the likelihood of recurrence is reduced.

See also: [horse diseases](#) 'mud fever' item.

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