

FOOT ABSCESS

A foot abscess is a common cause of severe lameness, normally affecting only one foot at a time.

This generally occurs when there is a defect in the white line, where the hoof wall meets the sole, allowing dirt and bacteria to travel up the hoof wall and infect sensitive tissue, or after bruising or a puncture wound to the sole.

The resulting infected fluid will cause pressure within the hoof capsule, which can cause extreme pain. There may also be an increased digital pulse and heat in the foot. The pulse is caused by dilation of the vessels and increased blood flow to the foot when inflammation is present.

Your vet can diagnose the location of the pain using hoof testers to assess the pain response at different points around the hoof wall. If your horse has a shoe on, normally your vet would remove it. They can then cut away part of the white line or sole to allow the infected fluid to drain. This will often result in an immediate improvement in the lameness. Occasionally it will not be possible to find the location.



In these horses it may be useful to poultice the foot for a few days to soften the foot and then look again. We may recommend you to 'hot tub' the foot, or soak it in warm water for a period of time each day to help this process.

After the pus is located, it is important to hot poultice the foot for a few days to allow the infection to drain out. Once the lameness has improved and no more fluid is draining we recommend dry wrapping the foot for a few days to prevent re-infection. Your horse should be kept in dry conditions during treatment and afterwards until the foot is healed. You vet will prescribe appropriate pain relief during treatment for foot abscesses.

Occasionally pus will track all the way up the hoof wall and burst out at the coronary band.

Sometimes it is not possible to diagnose the source of pain even after several days poulticing. Further diagnostics such as x-rays may be appropriate in these cases to rule out other causes of lameness.

To prevent abscesses good foot care is very important. This includes picking your horses feet out daily, regular farriery to trim and shape the foot and avoid hoof wall cracks, and prompt treatment of any damage to the sole.

It is very important to seek immediate veterinary attention if your horse is non-weight bearing, especially if the sole has been punctured.



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