

Pigeon Fever

Disease facts:

- Bacterial infection caused by *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*
- Any age, sex or breed is susceptible
- Lives in the soil and survives well in the environment (up to 55 days)
- Incubation period or time from infection to clinical signs is 3-4 weeks
- Usually appears in late summer, fall or early winter

Transmission:

- Spread by flies and insects especially house, stable and horn flies
- Highly contagious and typically affects multiple horses
- Bacteria can infect open wounds and enter through mucous membranes

Clinical signs:

- Swelling of the chest, midline and groin areas
- Single to multiple subcutaneous abscesses developing into open draining wounds
- Pitting ventral edema and ventral midline dermatitis
- Lameness, swollen limbs
- Fever, depression, anorexia, weight loss
- Exudate or draining fluid is tan in color and odorless
- Internal abscesses and ulcerative lymphangitis are possible, but less common

Diagnostics:

- Clinical signs
- Gold standard: culture of exudate
- SHI Test (Serum Hemolysin Inhibition): useful for identifying systemic illness

Treatment:

- Hot pack or poultice abscessed areas until they soften to allow drainage
- Once abscess is open, daily irrigation with Chlorhexidine (diluted 1 tablespoon to 3 cups water or 1ml to 40 mls water) or Povidone-iodine (diluted 1 teaspoon to 3 cups water or 1ml to 100mls water) followed by application of fly ointment to reduce transmission
- Veterinary treatment to surgically lance, drain and lavage mature abscesses
- Antibiotics are used in select cases only such as systemically ill horses, fever, or certain types or distributions of abscesses
- Anti-inflammatory medications such as Bute or Banamine may be indicated
- Healing is usually complete in 2-3 months

Prevention:

- No vaccine is available and protective immunity for horses after infection is variable
- Fly spray regularly and apply Swat ointment to chest and abdominal areas of all horses daily
- Use adult fly baits in the barns and start feed-through fly preventative for all horses (Solitude IGR)
- Isolation of infected animals if possible
- Removal of exudative material from drained abscesses
- Proper disposal or burning of contaminated bedding
- Insect control and good hygiene practices
- Use Oxine AH, Virkon S, or Chlorhexidine (diluted 1 to 3) to disinfect stalls and barn areas

Caution:

- Transmission from the horse to humans is possible, therefore, we recommend wearing gloves during treatment

Please contact us with any questions or concerns.