

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 biting flies especially house 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

Treatment:

- Hot pack or poultice abscessed areas until they soften to allow drainage
- Once abscess is open, daily irrigation with Nolvasan (diluted 1 tbsp to 3 cups water) or 0.1 % povidone-iodine 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 and Banamine as directed by Equus Veterinary Service
- Healing is usually complete in 2-3 months

Prevention:

- No vaccine is available
- Fly spray regularly and apply Swat ointment to chest and abdominal areas of all horses daily
- 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 Nolvasan (diluted 1 to 3) to disinfect stalls, shoes, clothing, hands and barn tools
- Protective immunity for horses after infection is variable

Caution:

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