

# **MID-HUDSON VETERINARY PRACTICE, PC**

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## **MANAGING INSECT ALLERGIES**

Insect-related allergies center around the bite and saliva of the insect. The inflammatory cycle then begins in the skin layers, with formation of a raised area (a hive or wheal) that itches. The itching causes damage to the skin, minor bleeding, hair loss, scabs and crusts. Most normal horses tolerate a small amount of itching bites, but allergic horses have an exaggerated response caused by histamine and other substances released in the skin. These horses are often so itchy that they will rub their bellies on the ground. The itching is often so incessant and forceful that they will form hematomas (blood blisters) near large veins.

The first goal of insect allergy management is the prevention of the first few insect bites, so that the exaggerated response can be controlled. The most common insect offenders are *Culicoides* species (or "no-see-ums") and other tiny species of gnats. The gnats attack the midline of the abdomen all the way from the chest to the groin in some horses, and mane and tail in others. Of course mosquitoes and flies are culprits, too.



Insect control centers around protection of the relevant areas of the horse's body using blankets, the Belly Dickie (a blanket that covers the lower half of the abdomen), fly sprays, and fly ointments. Keeping sensitive horses in the barn at dawn and dusk, and using fans to make stall air too turbulent for flying insects are also methods of control.

The second goal in the management of these allergic horses is control of, or decrease in, the skin reaction. Now allergy injections are available to help us achieve this goal. The injections act by desensitizing the horse against the compounds in *Culicoides* saliva. These injections may significantly improve the quality of life in the Hudson Valley for these horses.

The third goal of allergy management focuses on treating the results of the reaction. Medical treatments include antihistamines to control the itch, corticosteroids to control inflammation, and antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections.

**Please call us to discuss prevention of your horse's allergies.**



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