

Fact Sheet

Sarcoids



What are sarcoids?

Sarcoids are the most common tumour to occur in horses. They originate from fibroblast cells in the skin and can develop in multiple sites on the skin but never develop or spread inside the body. There is a genetic predisposition to developing sarcoids. There is also a link to bovine papillomavirus which causes warts in cattle, and to flies which might carry the virus.

How are sarcoids recognised?

There are 6 types of sarcoid:

1. Occult - thickened hairless skin with a rough surface, often slow growing
2. Verrucose - dry cauliflower or wart like lesions, hairless
3. Nodular - round protruding nodules, usually smooth, common around eyelids
4. Fibroblastic - firm irregular lesions with an ulcerated surface
5. Mixed - combination of verrucose and fibroblastic
6. Malignant – this is a rare, fast growing and often ulcerative mass

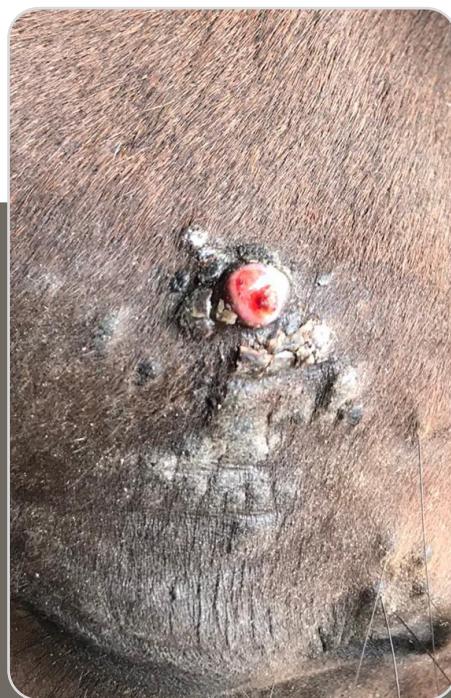
How can you diagnose sarcoids?

Diagnosis of sarcoids is generally made by visual examination by your vet who will look for typical features and locations. We do not normally recommend tissue sampling or biopsy for confirming a diagnosis of sarcoids as they often deteriorate after they are interfered with. However, sometimes a biopsy may be performed for confirmation but you must then be prepared to treat aggressively and promptly if the result is positive!

How can I treat/manage sarcoids?

We always recommend discussing treatment of your horse's sarcoids with your vet. Some might not require treatment although others need prompt and aggressive treatment before they get any worse. Sarcoids are unpredictable, and treatment can be quite involved in some cases and without guaranteed success. Recurrence is also not uncommon following treatment.

There are many treatment options and the type, size, number and location of sarcoids influences which treatment option is most appropriate. The temperament of the horse and cost of treatment are also factors.



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Treatment is likely to involve:

1. Laser or surgical removal. Removing sarcoids using laser surgery is the best option for many cases as recurrence is far less likely than with removal with a scalpel blade, but not all can be operated on in this way
2. Topical or injectable cytotoxic and antimitotic agents. These must be applied by a veterinary surgeon as they are all hazardous substances. The type of product and the number of applications will vary. Sarcoids usually turn black and hard following treatment before separating from underlying tissue. This can cause temporary pain and swelling
3. BCG injection - this can be used for sarcoids near the eye where other methods risk damaging the eye. The foreign protein in the BCG injection makes it easier for the horse's immune system to recognise the sarcoid and act against it
4. Banding (seen in this photo) - this is only to debulk sarcoids and almost always leaves a bit of sarcoid tissue behind. Cream may be used to treat the remaining stump/root



How can I prevent sarcoids?

There is no way to prevent sarcoids developing in your horse as some horses simply appear predisposed to develop them. However, a treatment considered and discussed with your vet as soon as sarcoids are seen is the best way to achieve success. Well developed sarcoids undoubtedly present far more problems with treatment and recurrence.



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