



# Equine Newsletter

## MAY 2015

Tvsul Vets - 01559 363318

### Atypical Myopathy

There was a surge of cases seen of this frequently fatal disease last autumn after periods of wind and rain where sycamore seeds and leaves were found on pasture. We are now seeing a second surge thought to be due to saplings emerging, which horses are ingesting whilst grazing.

The cause has been linked to a toxin (Hypoglycin A) found in the sycamore tree. The disease causes destruction of muscle which can include the heart and diaphragm. Clinical signs include weakness, muscle tremors, dark brown urine, reluctance to stand, difficulty eating and breathing and death. The disease can be mistaken as colic.

It is thought that some horses already have sub-clinical levels of the toxin in their body due to ingestion last autumn, so they are now at higher risk of acute disease from sapling ingestion. Furthermore, horses would often sift through surface leaves and seeds in autumn, choosing not to eat them, whereas the saplings are part of the pasture so are more likely to be eaten.



Figure 1 Sycamore Seedling



Figure 2 - Sycamore Seed

It is therefore advised to be aware of what is growing in your fields, especially if they are near any sycamore trees. If you find any areas where saplings are growing, it is advised to fence off these areas or not to graze in these fields. In autumn extra precautions can be made by picking up fallen seeds and leaves, and by ensuring adequate grazing is available or by providing supplementary hay.

For further information or if you have any concerns and would like to talk to one of our vets, please telephone us at the surgery on 01559 363318. (By Sarah Mosley, BVSc, MRCVS)

### MAY ONLY OFFERS

#### Wormers

<b>Equest 700g (Roundworm)</b>	<b>£13.45</b>	<b>£11.75</b>
<b>Equest Pramox 700g (Roundworm + Tapeworm)</b>	<b>£21.92</b>	<b>£18.75</b>

#### Fly repellent

<b>Switch 250ml Pour On</b>	<b>£37.80</b>	<b>£28.50</b>
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Prices shown are inclusive of VAT  
Cash sales only!

#### OPENING HOURS

MON - FRIDAY

8.30AM - 5.00PM

SATURDAY

9.00AM - 12.00PM

24 HR EMERGENCY COVER

PLEASE USE THE USUAL NUMBER  
01559 363318

EMAIL

tysulvets@gmail.com

## What is Equine Grass Sickness?

Equine Grass sickness (EGS) is a progressively weakening and often fatal disease in horses, ponies and donkeys. It was first seen over 100 years ago in Scotland. The disease is characterised by damage to a part of the nervous system that effects involuntary functions in the body such as gut movement, breathing and sweating. Unfortunately, due to the irreversible nerve damage there is no successful treatment available for EGS and prevention of the disease is challenging.

EGS is diagnosed in every county in both England and Wales and GB is reported to have the highest number of cases in the world.

### What are the signs of Grass Sickness?

There are 3 types of Grass Sickness: Acute, Sub acute and Chronic.

**Acute:** This has a severe and sudden onset. Horses with acute grass sickness die or require euthanasia within 48hrs of clinical signs appearing. Signs include:

- Depression,
- Ileus (lack of gut sounds)
- Salivation, difficulty swallowing and nasal discharge, including reflux of stomach contents.
- Muscle tremors
- Drooping of the eyelids
- Sweaty patches
- Abdominal discomfort (colic signs)
- Constipation.

**Sub acute:** These cases show milder but similar signs than acute cases, with affected horses often surviving beyond 2 days. However they will often die or require euthanasia.

**Chronic:** Signs develop more slowly than the acute and sub acute form. Signs include:

- Rapid and severe weight loss (right)
- Markedly tucked up abdomen
- Base narrow stance (legs tucked under body, feet placed closed together)
- Drooping eyelids.
- High heart rate.
- Muscle tremors and patchy sweating.
- Reduced appetite and difficulty swallowing.

### How is EGS diagnosed and treated.

EGS can sometimes be difficult to diagnose due to a vague presentation of clinical signs. It can be hard to distinguish between EGS and other causes of colic. Phenylephrine eye drops are commonly used in an aid to diagnosing EGS as they reverse the ptosis (drooping eyelids) seen in EGS. The only definite diagnosis of EGS is to take a biopsy of the small intestine during general anaesthetic which is often carried out to rule out the other causes of colic which are often present.

### How can we treat EGS?

Unfortunately there is no treatment for EGS. Acute and Sub acute cases often pass away or have to be put to sleep. Nutritional support, pain relief and nursing are the only options for chronic EGS with recovery variable between individuals. Complications include: choke, diarrhoea and pneumonia. Return to full weight may take several months with a recovery rate of about 50%.

### What causes EGS?

The main cause is unknown but evidence suggests that a bacteria in the soil (*Clostridium botulinum*) causes EGS. Toxins produced in the gut cause damage to the nervous systems, which then leads to the clinical signs seen.

### Risk factors:

- Horses aged 2-7 years
- Previous occurrence of EGS on the premises
- High soil nitrogen
- Sandy/loam type soil
- Movement of horses
- Disturbance of the pasture
- Changes in feeding regimes.

### How to prevent/reduce the risk of EGS?

Measures to take to avoid cases of EGS include:

- Avoiding grazing previously affected fields
- Avoid feed changes
- Reducing movements of horses between pastures/premises
- Co grazing with sheep and cattle.
- Supplementing feeding with hay.

By Liz Harries, BVSc, MRCVS



[www.tysulvets.co.uk](http://www.tysulvets.co.uk)

