

Lice

Lice are highly host specific parasites that spend their complete life cycle on the host meaning that lice that infect horses do not infect people. There are 2 main types of lice, the sucking lice and the biting lice. Biting lice feed on exfoliated skin and skin surface debris and prefer the dorsolateral trunk (towards the top and sides of the horse's body). Sucking lice feed on blood and tissue fluid and favor the mane, tail, and fetlocks. Under favorable conditions lice can live for up to 2-3 weeks on a horse but less than 7 days is more typical. Transmission is by direct horse to horse contact and by indirect contact by sharing grooming supplies, tack, etc. Treatment is usually easy and effective. Topical treatment with insecticidal shampoo or 1% selenium sulfide shampoo can be used once every 10 days for a total of 3 baths or an insecticide powder containing pyrethrins can be applied once every 2 weeks for a total of 2 treatments. We recommend following the product label instructions. In addition, administering an ivermectin dewormer orally may also be effective against the sucking lice.

The small yellowish eggs described on your horses may also be the eggs of internal parasites called bots or *Gasterophilus*. The adults are flies that lay eggs on the legs or head of the horse during the summer. The eggs get ingested by the horse and they develop into larvae or "bots" in the horse's stomach during the winter. As far as internal parasites go they are essentially harmless to the horse but are easily treated with ivermectin or moxidectin dewormer medications. We recommend treating for these parasites in the late fall and/or early winter.

Horse people all wish for "quick remedies" in dealing with underweight or malnourished horses. However it is usually a slow process depending on the degree of malnourishment. Good quality hay is probably the most important part of the horse's diet. Having the hay tested by a local feed company (we use Blue Seal) will give you the protein and fiber content of the hay. The information will allow you to decide on the most appropriate grain to feed and the proper amount of that grain to feed to an individual horse. Generally speaking, in your situation I would recommend increasing the amount of fat in the horse's diet. This can be easily accomplished by supplementing the horse's current diet with corn, vegetable, or rice bran oil or rice bran depending on the horse's tolerance of oil added to the feed. Alternatively choose a grain with 12-14 % protein, 7-10% fat and a low percentage of carbohydrates. Gradually change the horses over to the new diet in 7-10 days. In addition the malnourished horse may also benefit from a balanced vitamin and mineral supplement that complements the type of hay and grain fed.

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