



E.C.V.V.H. Equine News Bit

Thrush: A Filthy or Functional Problem?

Filthy: It is a common perception that thrush is caused by poor hygiene and unclean living conditions. However, this may not be totally accurate.

Functional: The horse possesses a natural hoof-cleaning mechanism. As the horse bears weight on the foot, expansion of the frog and heel occurs. This continuous change in foot structure prevents the accumulation of material in the bottom of the foot. Impairment of this hoof-cleaning mechanism appears to be the outstanding cause of thrush, as thrush can be seen in horses living in “clean and dry” conditions, whereas other horses living in “filthy and wet” conditions may not have thrush.

Chronic lameness (especially in the heel area), improper or infrequent hoof trimming, and insufficient exercise can reduce the effectiveness of this mechanism and increase the risk of infection. This is especially a problem if these factors result in the heels growing longer, which causes the frog to recess. A horse is then unable to naturally clean these deep, narrow cavities, and the bacteria are trapped.

"Normal exercise is vitally important to promote normal physiology of the foot structures and to prevent organic material from packing into the sulci of the frog."

Treatment

Generally, thrush is a mild disease that is easy to treat. There are several commercial products available that are effective in treating thrush. However, if the causative factors (chronic lameness, improper or infrequent hoof trimming, infrequent or insufficient exercise) are not corrected, the infection will likely reoccur. Cleaning your horse's hooves daily, helps to prevent this infection from occurring, and allows you to identify this problem before it gets out of hand (or hoof)!