



# FACTSHEET

## Sarcoids

There is still a lot to be learnt about equine sarcoids. They are best described as a type of skin cancer. Sarcoids are a tumour of fibroblasts, which are a normal skin cell responsible for many structural aspects of skin. They can be similar in appearance to a wart and are also thought to be related to the bovine papilloma virus. However the major difference between an equine sarcoid and a wart is that a sarcoid is usually permanent whereas warts usually regress in time.

Sarcoids DO NOT spread to internal organs although they can be locally invasive and grow to quite a large size. Depending on their location they can sometimes be life threatening. The most important thing to remember about equine sarcoids is that

**'the only predictable thing about equine sarcoids is that they are totally unpredictable'.**

Any horse of any age can be affected. An individual horse may have one or multiple sarcoids on its body and these can all be the same type or different.

There are six types of sarcoid:

**Occult**  
**Verrucous**  
**Nodular**  
**Fibroblastic**  
**Mixed**  
**Malignant**

Once a horse has a sarcoid it is likely that it may develop more; some horses seem to have a predisposition to developing sarcoids in relation to others.

As a general rule, sarcoids grow in the winter and multiply in the summer. We suspect that fly transmission in the warmer months has a lot to do with this. We are often asked whether sarcoids are contagious, the truthful answer is that no one really knows, however it is thought that fly transmission may be a route of spread of sarcoids in some horses. It is important to remember however that for a horse to develop sarcoids it must have a predisposition, ie 10 horses could be in contact with a horse with sarcoids and only one or two may go on to develop a sarcoid.

It is important to realise both the insurance and purchase implications of sarcoids on a horse. Once a sarcoid has been diagnosed most insurers will pay out for any treatment given over the next 12 months. After this any further treatment for existing lesions or new lesions will not be covered by the insurance company and an exclusion will be noted on your policy. It is vital that you are both honest with your insurer and that you fully understand the small print of your individual policy.

Sarcoids noted at a pre-purchase examination (vetting) will be discussed with the purchaser. Sarcoids are found very commonly in horses, and their presence is not simply a question of pass or fail at a vetting, but a risk assessment based on the whole picture. If the horse is right in every other way, it may still be worth purchasing but you must realise that any future treatment will be expensive and will not be insurable (as this is a pre-existing condition). Sarcoids can also affect the future sale-ability of a horse.

**For treatment advice please see the 'Sarcoid Treatment factsheet'.**

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