

# Skin scurf

How to identify eight common ailments that develop on a horse's skin.

AILMENT	SURFACE FEATURES	SENSATION	CAUSE	REMEDY
<b>dew poisoning</b>	weeping patches with thick scabs embedded in the hair primarily on the lower legs and muzzle; easily confused with sunburn	painful	juices of certain plants—small-headed sneezeweed, stinging nettle, spurge and others—irritate skin	<b>treatment:</b> wash with mild soap and water then dry the area thoroughly; corticosteroids or zinc oxide ointment may ease the reaction/promote healing <b>prevention:</b> identify and eliminate suspect plants from pastures and paddocks; apply a barrier—ointment or bandages—to the muzzle and pasterns when the horse is at pasture
<b>lice</b>	dry, waxy crusts and scurfs; hair loss from rubbing; first noticeable on shoulders and neck	extremely itchy	rampant lice infestation; susceptibility increases as stresses of lower environmental temperature weaken resistance to external parasites	<b>treatment:</b> livestock insecticide powder: apply to all horses on the premises as well as to tack, brushes, rubbing posts, etc. <b>prevention:</b> avoid overcrowding and keep horses healthy and immunologically strong
<b>photosensitivity</b>	purplish discoloration followed by formation of thick scabs mostly on pink skin perpendicular to the sun's rays—the face, top of fetlocks, coronary bands	painful as if sunburned	excess amounts of certain chemicals in clover, alfalfa and other plants are unable to be processed by the liver, triggering extreme sensitivity to sunlight on skin	<b>treatment:</b> shield affected areas of skin from sunlight with wraps, a muzzle cover or sheet; apply zinc oxide ointment to affected areas <b>prevention:</b> in susceptible animals, avoid feeding causative plants and protect pink skin from sunlight
<b>rainrot</b>	scabby crusts that follow the runoff pattern of rain on the body	painful	overgrowth of <i>Dermatophilus</i> organisms; triggered when moisture falls onto the dirty coat of a susceptible horse	<b>treatment:</b> penicillin; loosen the scabs with ichthammol salve or equal parts 2 percent iodine and mineral oil; shelter convalescing horse from weather <b>prevention:</b> regular, thorough grooming, especially for susceptible horses kept outdoors
<b>ringworm</b>	hairless patches with crusts and scabs	no pain or itch	highly transmissible fungal infection, likely <i>Microsporium</i> or <i>Trichophyton</i> ; can be passed to people	<b>treatment:</b> wear rubber gloves and bathe the horse with human dandruff shampoo; work off scabs and crust <b>prevention:</b> disinfect tack and equipment as well as wash stall, cross ties and fences in communal areas to help limit an outbreak
<b>scratches</b>	chapping, then cracking and crusting in the wrinkle pattern at the back of the pastern	painful to the touch	excessive drying and loss of skin oils, especially on pink skin	<b>treatment:</b> before cracking occurs: apply heavy-duty hand cream; if cracked and tender: clean with mild soap and water, trim long hairs, dry thoroughly, apply zinc oxide ointment and bandage daily <b>prevention:</b> avoid chapping of skin; limit bathing that can strip oils and apply protective ointment as needed
<b>seborrhea</b>	waxy or greasy skin with a fetid odor	no pain or itch	mild cases are associated with shedding; persistent cases are associated with underlying illness	<b>treatment:</b> bathe horse with shampoo formulated to relieve the problem; if the condition persists, call your veterinarian to rule out thyroid malfunction and liver or intestinal disease
<b>sweet itch</b>	thickened patches with hair damage; affected areas become bare and weepy as the horse rubs for relief	extremely itchy, worsened by rubbing	allergy to saliva of no-see-ums, midges, culicoides, etc; in subsequent years, fewer bites incite the reaction	<b>treatment:</b> corticosteroids may relieve itching; protect horses from further bites <b>prevention:</b> apply repellent, shelter susceptible horses at dawn and twilight, the insects' peak feeding hours; relocate horse to another climate if his reaction is severe