

SWEET ITCH

MYTH: Sweet Itch is a rare condition; **REALITY:** About 1 in 20 horses and ponies in the UK suffer.

MYTH: Spring is the worst time for Sweet Itch; **REALITY:** Autumn is often the worst time.

MYTH: Sweet Itch only affects pony breeds; **REALITY:** There are many horses of 15hh and over with sweet Itch.

MYTH: All midges cause Sweet Itch; **REALITY:** The dancing midges that appear over water and bushes are larger and are non-biting.

MYTH: Culicoides need streams and rivers to breed; **REALITY:** They breed in moist soil, rotting vegetation and muck heaps, not in flowing water.

MYTH: Culicoides need trees; **REALITY:** They can shelter in any herbage, including grass. But trees do create still air, which they prefer.

MYTH: Sweet Itch is due to eating rich, sweet grass in spring - hence the name "Sweet Itch"; **REALITY:** It is coincidence that midges emerge to do their damage in the spring.

MYTH: Some horses are bitten, others are not; **REALITY:** All horses may be bitten but only some individuals show an allergic reaction.

MYTH: Horses can be protected from Sweet itch by feeding garlic; **REALITY:** Culicoides find their prey mainly by sight, not smell.

MYTH: Feed additives can help Sweet Itch; **REALITY:** We have had no success with mineral supplementation and it is difficult to see how it could impact on an immune system disorder. Claims are also made for substances which "can be fed to horses with Sweet Itch". We know of no reliable reports of equine clinical trials that support these claims. Indeed one could say "Polo Mints can be fed to horses with "Sweet Itch"

MYTH: Boosting the horse's immune system will help Sweet Itch; **REALITY:** Sweet Itch is caused by an over-active immune system, not one that needs boosting.