



Dermatophilosis (Rain Rot)

Disease Name: *Dermatophilus congolensis* (“Rain Rot”)

Disease definition: *Dermatophilus congolensis*, otherwise known as “rain rot”, is a bacteria that lives on the skin of horses and other equids. It is typically dormant and causes no symptoms. However, moist conditions, as well as a compromised immune system, may lead to inflammatory lesions. These lesions appear as scabs, crusts, and hair loss most commonly seen on the dorsum (back) and distal limbs.

Transmission: *D. congolensis* is transmitted through direct contact with an infected equid. Shared tack, grooming brushes, or other equipment is a common cause of spread.

Frequency: Common, especially in geographic regions with heavy rain seasons.

Incubation period: There is no defined incubation period for *D. congolensis* as the bacteria is often present on the skin surface and only becomes pathologic when the ideal conditions (moisture, compromised immune system) are met.

Carrier status: Many healthy equids have the bacteria that causes rain rot, *D. congolensis*, on their skin.

Shedding period: There is no defined shedding period for *D. congolensis* as the bacteria can be spread through direct transmission at any time. However, moisture is required for the release of the zoospores that cause clinical signs.

Latency: Once the infective zoospores are released following exposure to moisture, they can survive in the crusts/scabs at ambient temperatures for up to 42 months.

Severity: Most infections with *D. congolensis* are mild and easily resolved with drier conditions and topical treatments.

Clinical signs and symptoms: Scabs and crusts with tufts of hair along the back, limbs, face, or neck. Removal of the scabs usually reveals an underlying bald spot with or without ulceration. Rarely, severely affected animals may have secondary infections and experience fever, lethargy, inappetence, or enlarged lymph nodes.

Diagnoses: Presumed *D. congolensis* infection can often be diagnosed based on history and physical exam. The organism can be identified in direct smears made of the crusts/ scabs and stained. A biopsy may be submitted for histopathology, however this is not often needed.

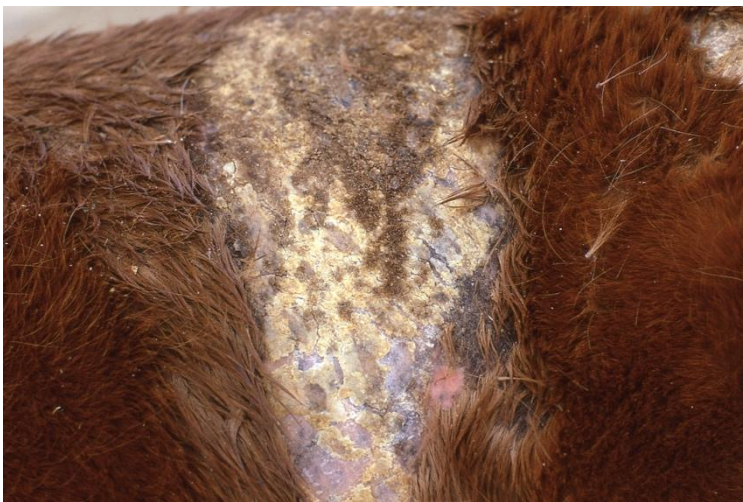
Treatment: Most mild infections can be resolved by limiting the equid’s exposure to moisture and applying topical anti-microbial products. It is recommended to remove the crusts using a chlorhexidine-based shampoo and gently scrubbing with a brush or curry comb. More severe infections may require systemic antibiotics prescribed by your veterinarian.



Prognosis: Excellent with appropriate intervention.

Prevention: Pathologic infection with *D. congolensis* can be prevented by keeping equids in dry, clean conditions, providing adequate nutrition, and grooming routinely to support skin health.

Biosecurity: Avoid sharing grooming supplies and tack between horses. Alternatively, clean equipment thoroughly between uses.



Crusts and mats of hair on a horse's back from dermatitis caused by *Dermatophilus congolensis*. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Nat White.)