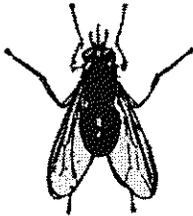


Fly And Mosquito Control Suggestions For Horses



Bothersome and harmful fly and mosquito problems on horses can be limited and controlled.

"Insects can cause horses to become nervous and interrupt performance by stomping, rubbing and switching its tail," said Ann Swinker, Penn State Extension horse specialist.

"The stress can compromise the health of an animal, and disease-producing organisms can be transmitted," Swinker added.

There are a number of different kinds of flies as well as mosquitoes, gnats and ticks that prey on horses, explained F.B. Peairs, Colorado State entomology professor.

House, face and stable flies can all transmit disease, infection and stomach worms, while small horn flies suck blood and are often a nuisance when horses are in contact with cattle.

Horse and deer flies have a painful bite, often drawing blood, and carry equine infectious anemia. Gnats bite and can cause "sweet-itch" along the mane, tail and face.

"Mosquitoes feed on horses in great numbers, produce significant blood loss, annoyance and transmit a number of diseases," Peairs detailed. "They can fly several miles from the standing water breeding sites to feed and spread West Nile virus."

Bot flies are especially harmful to horses. "They lay eggs on the horse, hatch when the horse licks and then migrate into the stomach causing damage to the lining and in extreme cases a rupture or fatal colic," Swinker indicated.

"Ticks are dangerous not only because they can result in unthriftiness, anemia and susceptibility to disease, but because they spread Lyme disease," Peairs confirmed.

Sanitation is essential in controlling flies. Dr. Nick Saint-Erne, Petsmart veterinarian, urged horse owners to clean stalls diligently, keep feed off the ground, eliminate standing water, mow weeds, remove trash and provide ample ventilation.

"Stalling horses during daily peaks of fly activity can provide some relief," Swinker suggested.

Foggers, fly baits, fly tapes and electric zappers are recommended by Saint-Erne to reduce fly populations.

"There are several types of clothing to protect horses including fly masks, fly sheets and mesh leg wraps," stated Saint-Erne.

Flies can sometimes get under the fly mask and become a more stressful problem, Swinker commented. Also, there have been instances where the masks have shifted on the head and caused strain around the horse's ears.

Many fly repellents are available in sprays, lotions, ointments and roll-on sticks.

"Before using a pesticide, read the label," Swinker emphasized. "Be sure to follow all directions and precautions."

Pyrethroids, a derivative of marigold flowers, are a common fly control ingredient and work effectively without harm to horses or horsemen, Swinker verified. Users were urged to check ingredients of repellents.

A study on horse handlers' exposure to pesticides was conducted by Swinker several years ago at Colorado State. She found that users were exposed to horse fly repellents an average of five times a day.

Swinker warned horsemen to be cautious about over exposure to any pesticides. It is a good practice to wear gloves and other protection when applying insecticides to reduce human exposure. Handlers should wash after using repellents.

While fly repellent effectiveness is short lived, Swinker advised not applying over once daily.

"Do not use household pesticides for horse fly control," Swinker pointed out. "They are oil-based and will irritate, sometimes even blister, a horse's tender skin. The sun further intensifies the irritation."

Horse riders must not use household pesticides for personal insect control when riding or handling their horse. A number of products such as Off and Cutter are specifically made for human use.

"Riders can wear long sleeved shirts and pants and other protective clothing to help reduce fly and mosquito irritation," Swinker suggested.

Pour-on insecticides used on cattle can be hazardous when applied to horses because of the horse's tender skin and are not recommended.

"Insecticides containing organophosphates are extremely harmful to pregnant horses and pregnant women and should never be used," Swinker stressed.

"Regular deworming helps prevent flies and will prevent bot eggs ingested by the horse from hatching into parasites and wreaking havoc on the intestinal system," Saint-Erne elaborated.

While biological control of flies with tiny, nocturnal, stingless wasps can be used, Swinker said, they become ineffective with application of chemical repellents, that kill the wasps as well as the flies.

Flies are often more of a nuisance than harmful, Swinker commented, but they can be especially dangerous too if a horse is caused to shy, jump or buck from the irritation.

"Mosquitoes and ticks are extremely harmful due to potential spread of West Nile and Lyme disease, respectively, and special efforts must made to control them," Swinker concluded.



Fly masks protect horses' faces, but flies can get under the mask and cause havoc. Problems have also occurred when masks shift and strain the horse's ears.