

# AT A GLANCE

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## Insect Bite Hypersensitivity IN HORSES

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INSECT BITE HYPERSENSITIVITY (IBH) is an allergic reaction to the saliva of biting insects such as *Culicoides* (aka “no-see-ums,” midges, gnats), mosquitoes, black flies, and horn flies.

The bites elicit an allergic response from sensitive horses, resulting in hives (urticaria) and/or crusty patches of bumps.



The bites and sores are usually on a horse’s:

- ▶ Ears | Back | Mane | Tail | Anus | Belly

Some other names for the condition:

- ▶ *Culicoides* sensitivity | Sweet itch | Queensland itch | Kasen | Summer itch



Horses with IBH experience intense pruritis (itchiness) and often end up in an itch-scratch cycle—the more they scratch, the more they itch. Often, they’ll rub out their manes and tails, and scratching can lead to permanently damaged hair follicles and thickening of the skin. Extensive scratching can cause secondary bacterial infections.



Intense itching and scratching can lead to hair loss.

While horses of any breed can have IBH, researchers believe there might be a genetic link that predisposes horses to the condition. Iceland doesn’t have *Culicoides*; interestingly, an estimated 20% of Icelandic Horses imported into the United States suffer IBH.



These Icelandic Horses wear “sweet itch” sheets.

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of Icelandic Horses imported into the U.S. suffer from IBH

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### Insect Bite Hypersensitivity In Horses

Your veterinarian might treat acute IBH with antihistamines and/or corticosteroids. Topical ointments containing antihistamines and/or corticosteroids might also offer your horse relief. However, there's no IBH cure, and multimodal management is usually the best option for horses with the condition.

### WARNING!

Certain horse show associations ban the use of corticosteroids. If you're actively competing, check with your veterinarian and the forbidden substances list of your sport's governing body before medicating your horse, even with topical ointments.



### Feed omega-3s

Research shows that omega-3 fatty acids, which are abundant in flaxseeds, might help reduce the inflammatory response associated with IBH.

### Limit insect habitat

Many biting insects reproduce in water or wet areas. Eliminate these habitats by dumping standing water from buckets. Look for unexpected water traps, such as tires or tarps, around the barn that are holding water. And house your IBH horse away from wetlands.



### Use a fly sheet and other barriers

Fine-mesh fly sheets and masks that cover your horse's body, chest, and belly can protect him from biting insects. Some fly sheets even come pre-impregnated with insecticides.



### Apply insecticides

Certain insecticides can offer some protection to your horse from biting insects.

### Bring your horse inside

Biting insects are busiest during dusk hours, so bring your horse inside—away from the bugs—when they're active.

### BONUS TIP!

Point a running box fan on your horse in his stall. Many biting insects—especially midges—are poor fliers and will avoid the air current, which in turn means they'll stay away from your horse.



### Talk to your veterinarian about allergy testing and treatments

Veterinarians use serum or skin testing and immunotherapy on horses with varying degrees of success. Talk to your veterinarian to find out what solutions are best for your horse.

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