

Cellulitis

Nathan Voris, DVM

Anyone with a horse has likely walked out to find them with a swollen, painful leg. While there are countless reasons for a horse to become "stoved-up" or "stocked-up", one of the most common is cellulitis.

Cellulitis can be literally defined as inflammation of subcutaneous tissues. Many times, a cause for the swelling cannot be found, but some common reasons for cellulitis include "scratches" (pastern dermatitis), blunt trauma, lacerations or small puncture wounds. Inflammation, with or without bacterial infection, that is trapped under the skin, is clinically expressed as heat and swelling of the affected tissues thus resulting in a swollen, painful leg. Many times the horse will be severely lame and might even have a fever.



Treatment of cellulitis often includes hydrotherapy, sweat/pressure bandaging, anti-inflammatories and antibiotics. Efforts should be made to find the inciting injury as other diagnostic tests or treatments might be required to adequately treat the horse's condition and to check the integrity of underlying bone and soft tissues.