

# Summer Sores:

## A Horse Owner's Guide

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What Causes a Summer Sore? The correct scientific term for a summer sore is Habronemiasis.

Habronemiasis is caused by the larvae of the Habronema stomach worm. "The infective larvae" of the Habronema "invade skin wounds and result in a condition commonly referred to as summer sores" (Riegel & Hakola, 1999).

The adult Habronema worms thrive in your horse's stomach and release their larvae into your horse's digestive tract. The larvae are passed out in your horse's manure and ingested by stable fly maggots in manure piles around your farm or in your manure heap. When the maggots mature into the adult stable fly, the stomach worm larvae then migrates to the head of the stable fly. The fly then flies around looking for a nice tasty open wound and whilst feeding it deposits the tiny stomach worm larvae onto your horse's wounds.

It is the stomach worm larvae in the wounds that cause irritation and the larvae feeding in the wound cause the wound to increase in size, often overnight. The larvae are yellow in color and are often described as being like 'sulfur granules'

The irritation and sensitivity can cause extreme itching (or pruritis). This is especially dangerous around the eye due to the risk of corneal ulceration from rubbing.

The areas most commonly affected are the lower legs esp. from the fetlock to coronet band, sheath, face, eyes and under-belly.

The prevalence of summer sores is higher in older horses and those with symptoms of insulin resistance or Cushing's Disease..

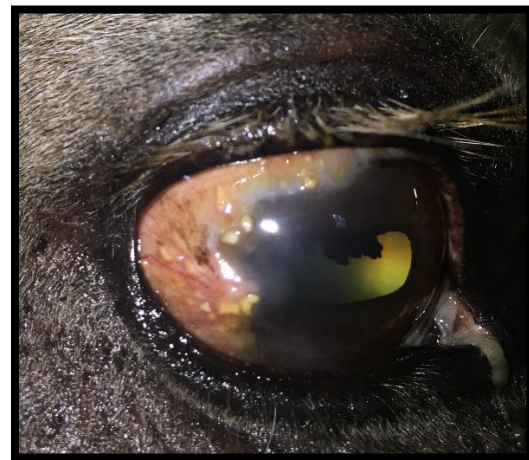
### What do they look like?

Pictured below is a typical summer sore on the lip. You can see it contains the classic yellow Habronema larvae. It has a pink 'fleshy' appearance which will normally bleed excessively when cleaning or debriding.



### How are they treated effectively?

In order to completely rid the wound bed of larvae, the wound should be cleaned and then the larvae debrided by your veterinarian. After the wound is cleaned aseptically it is dried and then a topical cream (often steroid and antibiotic) is applied and the wound is dressed with a bandage. In areas where you cannot bandage (face, sheath) the cream is covered with an aluminum spray and allowed to dry.



(above) A summer sore in the eye.

## Can summer sores be completely prevented?

The honest answer is no!

But you can do a whole lot of things to minimize the risk of your horse getting a summer sore,

1. Keep the manure pile as far away from your barn as possible.
2. Have the manure pile removed regularly.
3. Utilize fly sheets/ fly spray/fly masks/fly boots.
4. Consider installing an automatic barn fly misting system.
5. Regular deworming of your horse will help to kill any stomach worms.

*Tip - If your horse has had a summer sore before he may be likely to develop another one....be sure to clean and cover any open wounds to prevent them from developing into a summer sore.*

**Final Word** - So to be clear.....summer sores are **not** caused by stable fly larvae....they are caused by equine stomach worm larvae (habronemmas) that are hitching a ride on our common stable flies. Management of stable flies and regular deworming will go a long way to minimize your summer sore problems.

### Reference

Riegel & Hakola (1999). The Illustrated Atlas of Clinical Equine Anatomy and Common Disorders of the Horse. Equistar. Marysville, Ohio.

(below) Typical summer sores before treatment.



If summer sore goes untreated it will become worse and could affect other structures of the horse. (below)



The summer sore needs to stay covered until completely healed, which is evident when hair growth occurs.

Ivermectin paste wormer is recommended weekly for 3-4 weeks or until the summer sore is resolved.

*Tip - Summer sores can get out of control if left untreated – it is not uncommon for them to become the size of a golf ball or even an orange. If your horse has a wound that you suspect is a summer sore – you should call your veterinarian.*