

Moon Blindness

Moon Blindness

This devastating eye condition is named *Moon Blindness* because of its recurrent nature, as with lunar cycles. It is the single most common cause of equine blindness.

By current estimates, 8-25% of mature horses in the U.S. are affected with this problem. The Appaloosa breed is 8 times more likely to have uveitis than any other breed.

M o o n
Blindness,
Recurrent or *Periodic Ophthalmia*, *Anterior Uveitis*, *Iridocyclitis* or correctly called **Recurrent Equine Uveitis**, in the simplest terms, is inflammation of the front portion of the horse's eye. Specifically, the portion in front of the lens called the anterior chamber.

Inflammation of this anterior chamber is therefore called *Anterior Uveitis*. The inflammation causes blood vessels to "leak" cells and unwanted proteins into this anterior fluid chamber in the eye. This, in turn, can coat and cloud the cornea and lens surfaces. This coating can also cause the iris to "stick" to the lens or cornea. These changes can be mild or severe. They are generally

permanent and episodes tend to recur. Each episode deprives the horse of more vision and can eventually lead to complete blindness.

Several different causes of *Moon Blindness* have been well documented. Some of the most common initiating causes are:

- 1 Viral infections such as Influenza or Rhinopneumonitis
- 2 Parasite migrations such as Onchocerca or Toxoplasmosis (transmitted from barn cat feces)
- 3 Liver or kidney disease
- 4 Leptospirosis - the most common agent.

Leptospira is a bacteria found most often in stagnant water. In this area, it is common in dairy cattle and deer. Leptospira rarely causes any generalized disease in horses when they are exposed, however, it stimulates an excessive immune response directed at the eye.

Leptospira vaccines are not approved for horses and vaccines (designed for other species) often stimulate the *Moon Blindness* condition. Therefore, vaccination of horses for Leptospirosis is not advised.

As horse owners, it is very important to recognize

the signs of early *Moon Blindness* since prompt treatment is essential to minimize permanent loss of vision. Signs and severity can vary greatly, but most commonly your horse will avoid bright sunlight. There will also be excessive tearing and squinting and they often keep the eyelid partially or completely closed.

Upon closer examination, the cornea will look cloudy or hazy. Inflammation, swelling and redness may also be seen.

Treatment should begin as soon as possible after a complete veterinary ophthalmic examination. Other eye conditions such as corneal ulcers or foreign bodies often show the same symptoms as described above, but the treatment protocol is very different.

Anterior Uveitis treatment consists of topical, injectable, and possibly oral anti-inflammatory medications to stop the inflammation within the eye. The underlying cause should be removed if it can be determined.

One or both eyes may be involved, either simultaneously or alternating. The key is early recognition and treatment of this common and potentially debilitating condition.

