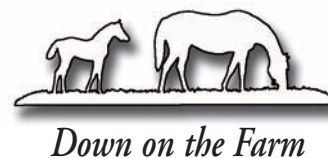


Fly & Mosquito Control: Protecting The Horse



by HEATHER SMITH THOMAS

Flies and mosquitoes can be a nuisance for horses, causing discomfort and irritation as they bite and suck blood. They are also a health hazard, spreading a variety of serious diseases.

Cliff Hoelscher, PhD, Professor of International Agriculture, Texas A & M (formerly an extension entomologist for more than 32 years), says effectiveness of various fly products depends partly upon whether the horse is working (and sweating) or not working.

“A working horse will experience a lot less residual effect from many of the insecticide/repellents you apply,” he says. Sweating will dilute and wash off much of the product.

He usually recommends a ready-to-use aerosol spray or wipe-on product because horses’ skin is very sensitive to insecticides. “If you use concentrates, you are more likely to overdose, and cause skin problems. Applying more than is needed will also cost more money, without giving more insect control,” says Hoelscher. Using twice the amount needed is costly and counterproductive, especially if your horse has a toxic or skin reaction.

“In general, daily or every other day application of the product is needed to control biting flies like horn flies or stable flies, and mosquitoes, especially on a working horse. People want to be able to spray their horse for mosquitoes and have it last a week, but that doesn’t work. The products are mainly pyrethrin or pyrethroid compounds and they are very effective, but the residual control is extremely short, and most people don’t realize this,” he says. Several things affect how long a product will be effective on the horse, including temperature, amount of moisture (such as rain or dew), and sweat.

It’s important to apply the product all over the horse’s body. “Total body coverage is necessary; mosquitoes will feed anywhere there’s a place they can get a blood meal. Biting flies may have preferred areas, however. Stable flies feed on the legs and chest because the skin is thinner and blood supply more readily available,” explains Hoelscher. Keeping these areas covered with insecticide can be a challenge if the horse is walking through tall grass or is out in the morning when dew is on the grass. Dampness and rubbing will take a lot of the insecticide off the legs.

“For mosquitoes and stable flies, apply it more frequently. How frequently, however, may depend on the size of the insect population. If you just have an occasional mosquito or stable fly, it won’t be necessary to reapply insecticide so often. But if the horse is continually bothered by these pests and stomping, or if you have mosquito-borne diseases in the area, be more diligent with the treatment,” he says.

Safety Concerns When Applying Sprays

Some horses are skittish when you use an aerosol product; if they are difficult to control apply the product in an area that is safe for you—such as having the horse behind a fence panel where the animal can’t kick or strike. “If we have a stable fly problem, I use a slatted board between me and the horse, so I can spray the legs without the horse being able to kick at me. Here at Texas A&M University we have a stall where we put one or two horses in at a time to treat, without any danger to ourselves. Safety should be your number one concern when doing insect control,” says Hoelscher. Some horses tolerate wipe-on products better than spray, and are less apt to react strongly to the application of these products.

Products

There are many products and brands available; check labels and ingredients to decide which ones might work best for various situations. The main ingredient in many products is permethrin. “This is a first generation pyrethroid. Cypermethrin is a second generation pyrethroid—a newer formulation that is more effective. Our chemists are always working to develop better formulations that are not broken down as quickly by sunlight, and can thus be more effective and long-lasting,” he says.

“There is a good product for horses who are working and sweating, called Endure. The label claims that horses won’t sweat it off as readily as some other products. Active ingredients include 0.15 percent cypermethrin and 0.2 percent resmethrin. Another good product is called Wipe-

Continued on next page





Down on the Farm Cont'd.

N-Spray (marketed by a company called Pyranha). It contains plant derived pyrethrins plus a small amount of pyrethroid (the two types of commonly used insecticide for horses). The naturally occurring one is pyrethrin, and the pyrethroids are synthetic," says Hoelscher.

"Another product in a class by itself is a concentrated fly repellent with a label claim that it gives two to three days of repellent effect for biting flies and mosquitoes. The active ingredient is 0.2 percent resmethrin," he says.

"There are a number of aerosol (ready to use) sprays that have some combination of cypermethrin, permethrin, etc. One of these is called Tri-Tec 14 (by Farnam) and has 0.15 percent cypermethrin and 0.2 percent permethrin. Another product in this class is Repel-X and it contains pyrethrin. Another, made by Pfizer, is Solitude, and it contains 0.25 percent permethrin and one percent pyrethrin. Another product is called Equine Fly and Mosquito Spray and it is made by Mannapro, with 0.25 percent permethrin. Another popular product is Mosquito Halt, with 0.2 percent permethrin. All of these are ready to use and don't have to be mixed," he says.

One of the sprays you have to mix with water is called Fly Ban. It is 7.4 percent permethrin, made by Martins. "This product is designed to be sprayed on the horse, for biting flies and mosquitoes. If you have a lot of horses, you can mix this up in a one gallon sprayer. Some horsemen use it to spray the whole group at feeding time." There are many other products, some of which are ready to use as

sprays, wipe-ons or roll-on materials and others are concentrates that need to be mixed before using.

Safety When Using Insecticides

Always read labels and follow safety precautions. Label information is almost always written in very small print, but safety precautions and dosages are larger and are easily read. "Manufacturing companies spent a lot of money developing and revising these; always follow the directions for use of these products. Read the major paragraphs on the label, pertaining to proper useage, dose rate and safety," he says.

When using a spray, wear rubber gloves to protect your hands, and a long sleeved shirt and long pants, or some type of coverall that covers arms and legs. "If you wear a hat or cap, this will also greatly reduce your exposure to face and eyes. Most people don't bother with wearing a mask (though it would be a good idea), but if they will use a cap or hat, this helps. Cover up well when spraying, and then wash your hands or bathe after you finish the treatment; this will greatly protect you from over-exposure to the insecticide," he says.

"We need to stress safe application, safety when handling the horse and applying the product, and proper clean up (washing your skin) afterward. Another safety precaution is to keep insectides locked up when not being used. Don't leave them out where children might find them, or workers who might not read the label and confuse it with something else. This could prevent accidental poisoning, and potential lawsuit if you run a public facility (such as a training or boarding stable," says Hoelscher. 🐾