

No See Ums...our local plague

By Pam Turner

It's that time of year when these little pests really go to town on our horses and us. Below is some information on them. I will be giving some first hand experience on how I fought them as my horse had probably one of the worst cases on the hill according to my Vet.

"A bug by any other name can still inflict a lot of pain, and aggravation. No-see-ums, a member of Ceratopogonids, carry a variety of regional names including, biting midges, punkies, sand fleas, jejenes, gnats and moose flies. Over 700 species exist worldwide. A bare 1/25 to 1/10 inch in length, these minute insects are easily capable of passing through a screen door. No-see-ums resemble a shorter, stubbier version of a mosquito with 2 hairy wings.

No-see-ums are often at their worst come dawn and dusk, during the middle to late summer. Light attracts them. They may resemble swarms of "dust" and produce a high-pitched noise produced by the incredibly rapid beating of their wings (approximately 133,000 beats per minute). It is not unusual for no-see-ums to fly into open mouths, ears or the eyes.

No-see-ums lay their eggs upon the water or within moist decaying organic matter. Hatching occurs in just 3 days. Their early larval stage is lived out within this aquatic environment. Borne of this aquatic environment, they possess a unique method of breathing through gills similar to fish.

It is only the winged mature adult female with a limited lifespan of just a few short weeks that feeds upon the blood of animals including horses, farm animals, turtles and humans.

For such a tiny pest, they possess exquisitely sharp jaws capable of cutting the skin, inflicting painful bites. Once the feeding process has begun, the saliva of the no-see-um prevents blood clotting to ensure a complete blood-sucking process. This is localized to the bite and has no systemic anti-clotting concerns. Raised red welts and even water-filled blisters can immediately form and last several days.

Since these bugs are so difficult to visualize, many patients may misdiagnose their condition and even the physician may mistakenly contemplate a contact or allergic dermatitis.

Prevention remains the best protection against no-see-ums. Protective clothing (long sleeved shirts and long pants) and the use of DEET containing insect repellants help reduce the likelihood of becoming a no-see-um snack. Turn house lights out at night when out on your porch or in the yard. This helps avoid attracting them. Avoid watery areas at dawn and dusk; no-see-ums tend not to stray far from their breeding ground. Eliminating backyard breeding sites by

draining stagnant water out of pots, yard depressions as one would with mosquito prevention."

Some Tips for Helping Your Horse:

You can tell your horse is being bothered if you see tails swishing and kicking at the belly during early morning and dusk. The bugs bite along the ventral line of the horse and the center of the belly and lower chest seem to be targeted the most. Check the belly area for bumps and scabs. The saliva carries eggs that end up under the skin in the neck and tail and create tremendous itching and rubbing.

What I found to be helpful:

- Frequent (monthly) worming with **Ivermectin wormer 1.87%** - I kept it up year round since the bugs are with us all the time and I wanted to break the breeding cycle. I usually bulk ordered it from County Supply.
- Fly spray daily- morning and night the best. I used a premethrin concentrate in order to control the strength of the solution. A local lady named Ray also developed a spray that seems to be effective for many. Her number is 310-514-8487.
- **Granulated garlic** was included in my horses feed to help him smell less attractive to the bugs. Smart & Final had large size. Garlic also enhances the immune system.
- At one point it got so bad on that I would spread vegetable shortening mixed with garlic on his belly. This actually seemed to help. The down side is that it left the belly greasy and the dirt would accumulate.
- **Pet Relief Anti-Itch Spray for Dogs, Cats and Horses** can be obtained at the local Petsmart. I found this *really helped the itching* and I sprayed his neck under the mane, belly and dock every day.

