

# Ask A Vet: Common Tumors of the Horse

*Sunday, January 15, 2017*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I found some sort of growth on my horse's ear that sticks out and seems to be oozing a little. Is this something that needs to be taken care of right away?

Dear Reader,

What you are describing is most likely a sarcoid. Sarcoids are one of the most common equine skin tumors. They do not metastasize to internal organs, but can be locally invasive. It can appear anywhere on the skin surface, especially the head, legs and underside of the barrel of the horse. Any horse, donkey or mule is at risk with Quarter Horses being overly represented. There are several categories of sarcoid, each with its own appearance. Occult sarcoids are flat, hairless areas which might be mistaken for ringworm or rub marks. Verrucous sarcoids are wart like in appearance. Nodular sarcoids are smooth round growths. Fibroblastic sarcoids tend to be fleshy, bloody and ulcerated. This last type is usually the most aggressive and fastest growing type.

Each sarcoid mass needs to be assessed by a veterinarian in order to tailor the therapy to its particular aspects. Many can simply be managed by "benign neglect" or "wait and watch". Surgical removal is another option but should only be attempted on select cases. Sarcoids have a bad reputation for coming back bigger and nastier after surgery. Cryotherapy (liquid nitrogen) will sometimes be used to freeze a mass whole or just the stump of a surgically excised sarcoid. Cisplatin, a chemotherapy drug, can be injected into the sarcoid to kill it from the inside out. Topical treatments are also available. These include Aldara, an immune system modulating drug and Xterra, a "blood root" extract. These last three treatments will often lead to ulceration and discomfort in the treated area before the tumor eventually falls off.

Have your veterinarian evaluate your horse's ear so an accurate diagnosis can be made. He or she can then provide you with treatment options. Sarcoids aren't in anyway a life or death matter, but neither should you procrastinate in seeking help. The sooner you initiate treatment, the more likely you are to have a successful outcome.

-Dr. Wade Hammond