

This past winter, Albertans have seen snow storm after snow storm hit. In some places, snow drifts are as high as fence lines. With all this snow, spring promises to be messy when the ground starts thawing and the snow starts melting. Mud can cause problems for horse owners. It affects pastures and can cause health issues or diseases in horses.

## **Pastures and Mud**

Spring is a great time to check your pastures. Take a walk around the fence line and check for fences that may have become damaged with high winds or snowfalls that occurred in winter. Fence posts can also shift when the ground is wet and muddy. Fertilizing the ground in spring can prolong the quality and health of your pastures. Grass, like any other plant, requires certain nutrients. However, apply fertilizer only during when the ground is dry. Fertilizing when there is an excess of mud can cause the fertilizer to run off into streams or rivers, which can create problems for your horses or wildlife. If you do decide to fertilize, make sure that you keep your horses off the pasture for as long as advised by the specific fertilizer.

To get the most out of your grazing pastures in the upcoming season, wait until the ground has dried out before turning horses onto the land. If the ground is too wet and muddy, horse hooves can rip up the ground and create ruts in the soil. Experts suggest that the grass should be at least 3 inches high before allowing horses to graze. Pastures with grass under 3 inches will become over-grazed and will lack nutrients for horses. Ideally, grass should be 6-8 inches high and the ground should be dry before horses are turned out to graze.

## **Horse Health Issues due to Mud**

Mud can cause several problems for horses. The problems can range from pulled shoes to diseases. Skin dermatophilosis such as mud fever, grease heel, or scratches are a concern for horse owners during the spring. Symptoms of Equine Dermatophilosis are crusty scabs, matted hair, pink skin, and oozing puss. If left untreated, the skin can become cracked and infected. Drying the infected area out and applying an antiseptic soap can help. Call your veterinarian if

the condition doesn't improve.

Hoof problems, such as cracked hooves or thrush, can also be a problem when there is an excess of mud. Mud can dry out horse hooves, leading to cracks. And while thrush is not caused by mud, it is common during wet seasons. Make sure hooves are trimmed regularly by a farrier, who can help solve these problems created by mud.

## **Tips**

- Consider putting wood chips or crushed gravel down in areas that horses frequent, such as shelters or watering areas. This will prevent some of the mess that horses will create while using the areas.
- Make sure that gutters direct runoff water away from horses.
- Divide up your pasture into areas that horses can be rotated through to prevent over-grazing and torn up soil

Keeping your horses in a dry pasture or paddock will keep your horses safe and healthy during the soon-approaching thaw.