How often should I clean the sheath?

- This will vary from horse to horse but, on average, every two to four weeks should be sufficient.
- Overcleaning should be avoided otherwise the normal bacteria are removed allowing fungal overgrowth to take place – a cursory wash is all that is required in most cases.
- Smegma can build up leading to discomfort, swelling or infection.
- Smegma build up is more common in the winter, especially if a horse is overweight as fat is partly stored in the sheath.
- Older geldings frequently have mildly swollen sheaths in the winter as they move around less and circulation in the sheath becomes poorer in the cold weather.
- The sheath can be safely cleaned by standing next to the elbow of the horse and gently wiping inside the sheath with a warm wet sponge.
- If the horse resents this procedure, a useful alternative is to smear KY Jelly inside the sheath which will loosen the smegma flakes.

WHAT CAN I USE TO CLEAN A SHEATH?

- proprietary sheath cleaning fluid
- luke warm water
- KY jelly
- do not use any antiseptic such as Hibiscrub® as this will remove the natural bacteria.

The sheaths of geldings tend to ‘stagnate’ a little as they do not use the penis as often as a stallion might.
SHEATH PROBLEMS

What other problems may occur within the sheath?

- A ‘bean’ or ‘pea’ is a build-up of smegma in the urethral fossa, a small cavity in the tip of the penis. This can be painful and irritating – sedation may be necessary to allow its removal.
- Fungal or bacterial infections can cause pus to build up within the inside of the sheath.
- Melanomas or other tumours of the penis and sheath become more common as the horse gets older.

When do I need to call my vet?

- If your horse’s sheath is enlarged and does not reduce with cleaning and exercise.
- If you notice a discharge or smell from the sheath.
- If there are any growths on the penis or sheath.
- If your horse is having difficulty urinating or appears to be painful around the sheath.

For further information contact your local XLVets Equine practice:

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