



What Are Sarcoids?

Sarcoids are among the most common skin tumors in horses, caused by an abnormal proliferation of fibroblasts (cells that form connective tissue). They are nonmalignant (noncancerous) in the sense that they don't spread internally, but they are locally invasive and can grow and spread across the skin. The exact cause isn't fully understood, but there is a strong link between sarcoids and bovine papillomavirus (BPV) types 1 and 2.

Sarcoids can occur in horses of any age, breed, or sex, though some horses might have a genetic predisposition. Common locations include the face (especially around the eyes and ears), chest, legs, and sheath or udder area. These tumors can be persistent, aggressive, and prone to recurrence.



Clinical Signs

Sarcoids can appear in various forms, often categorized by appearance:

- **Occult:** Flat, hairless, slightly scaly areas, often mistaken for ringworm or rub marks.
- **Verrucous:** Warty, dry, and scaly lesions that might resemble fungal infections.
- **Nodular:** Firm, round lumps under the skin, often movable unless attached to deeper structures.
- **Fibroblastic:** Fleshy, ulcerated, bleeding growths, usually more aggressive.

■ **Malevolent:** Rare, rapidly spreading lesions that invade lymphatics and are very difficult to treat.

■ **Mixed:** A combination of two or more types.

Sarcoids vary in size and can grow slowly or rapidly, sometimes staying static for years before suddenly becoming aggressive.



Diagnosis

The veterinarian will examine your horse's skin lesion and might be able to make a diagnosis based on clinical appearance and location alone. A biopsy can confirm the diagnosis, although it must be done with caution. In some cases, disturbing a sarcoid through biopsy or improper handling can cause it to grow faster or spread.



Treatment and Management

There is no one-size-fits-all treatment for sarcoids. Several options are available, and the choice depends on the sarcoid type, size, and location, as well as the horse's overall health. Common treatments include:

- **Surgical removal:** Can be effective, but recurrence is common unless the tumor is completely excised with clear margins.
- **Cryotherapy:** Freezing the sarcoid with liquid nitrogen; often used in conjunction with other treatments.
- **Laser therapy:** Helpful in delicate

areas (e.g., around the eyes).

■ **Topical treatments:** Such as creams or cytotoxic agents.

■ **Immunotherapy:** Includes injecting the sarcoid with BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin) or using autogenous vaccines.

■ **Chemotherapy:** Local application of cytotoxic drugs like cisplatin beads.

■ **Radiation therapy:** Highly effective but expensive and limited to specialized facilities.

Successful management often requires a multimodal approach and close veterinary oversight. New sarcoids can appear even after existing ones are treated, so regular monitoring is key.



When to Call Your Vet

Call your vet if you notice any of the following:

- A new lump or hairless patch that persists or grows.
- A lesion that bleeds, ulcerates, or becomes infected.
- Any lump or skin change near sensitive areas like the eyes or genitalia.
- A previously stable sarcoid begins to grow or change rapidly.
- A sarcoid located on a part of the body that could cause the horse discomfort (e.g., girth area when ridden).
- You're unsure whether a skin lesion is a sarcoid or something else (like melanoma, squamous cell carcinoma, or a fungal infection).