Ocular Squamous Cell Carcinoma

What is ocular squamous cell carcinoma?
• The most common eye cancer in horses
• Tumors may grow rapidly and can spread to invade adjacent tissues, causing visual impairment and destruction of the eye.
• UV light exposure is a predisposing factor for tumor development.
• A genetic risk factor has been identified in Haflingers and Belgians and a DNA test is available to identify at-risk horses from these breeds.
• Early detection of tumors may lead to a more successful outcome.

What you can do to keep your horse healthy:
• Horses with white or pink eyelids are at greater risk of developing ocular squamous cell carcinoma. Horses with a chestnut-based coat color also appear to be at higher risk.
• Owners can use the DNA test to identify horses that have two copies of the risk variant and take precautions to protect them.
• Horses that are at higher risk should have routine eye exams, wear UV-protective fly masks, and be stabled during peak sunlight hours.

Signs
• Raised, rough lesions
• Thick yellow discharge from the eye
• Small, red areas that look like burns and bleed intermittently

Cause
• Inherited
• Identified genetic variant explains 80% of cases
• Additional genetic risk factors are likely

Treatment
• Surgery
• Chemotherapy
• Radiation therapy
• Cryotherapy
• Removal of affected eye

*If your horse needs medical care, contact the Large Animal Clinic at (530) 752-1393. For genetic testing, contact the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory at vgl.ucdavis.edu.

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