

Pest Bulletin

Toxic Weed Series



Alsike Clover, flower

ALSIKE CLOVER

Hay or pasture containing a large percentage of alsike clover is generally not recommended for horses. While the compound that causes the toxicity is not known for sure, susceptibility seems to depend on the area where the alsike is grown and the individual horse.

Plant material contains chlorophyll, which when ingested by a healthy horse will be converted into phylloerythrin and removed from the blood by the liver, causing no harm to the horse. It is believed that alsike contains some compound, possibly an alkaloid, which causes liver dysfunction. A horse with a damaged liver cannot remove the phylloerythrin from its systems, and so it is deposited into the skin cells instead. When certain UV lights hit these skin cells, they react and can turn into a severe sun burn on areas that are not protected by hair or pigmentation, such as in black skin. Therefore, liver damage may be present with or without any signs of photosensitization.

Other possible symptoms include:

- Lining of eyelids, or conjunctiva, become red and swollen
- Inflammation and lesions of the muzzle, mouth, tongue, eyes, eyelids, and ears, with discharge from the lesions
- Jaundice
- Nervousness
- Digestive disorders; "off feed"
- Brownish urine
- Clay-colored feces

If you notice symptoms that you suspect indicate alsike clover toxicity, remove horses from the pasture and change their feed. Contact your veterinarian to obtain a correct diagnosis.

Lontrel 360 provides excellent control of clover when applied to actively growing plants either in the spring or fall. Use 420 ml/ha (170 ml/acre) applied in 100 to 200 L/ha of water. Forages treated with Lontrel may be grazed immediately following treatment.

For more information please visit the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands www.gov.bc.ca/al/

