

Chemical Burns From Digital Dermatitis Treatment

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I received a call from a bewildered hoof trimmer who reported that digital dermatitis (DD) was extremely prevalent in his area. This type of call is rare and usually the opposite is reported. Over the years we have learned how to manage our dairy operations to keep DD under control. So what could be the reason this trimmer was seeing so much DD?

I asked typical questions: How is the hygiene on the farms? Are these farms closed herds or do they purchase animals? What are they doing to prevent DD? His answers indicated the farms were generally well managed.

When I asked if he saw positive results post-treatment, he indicated that DD was eliminated quickly, within five to eight days of treatment. However, the reoccurrence rate was about 80 percent within three months to six months. This led me to, "What is your treatment protocol for DD?" He reported this regime:

1. Cleaning the lesion thoroughly
2. Soaking lesions with hydrochloric acid (Muriatic® Acid)
3. Applying tetracycline powder
4. Applying a wrap

Now I had the answer to his problem. Hydrochloric acid was causing chemical burns to the lesions and the healthy skin surrounding them. The treatment was very effective short-term, but the chemical burn was damaging the healthy skin creating a perfect environment for bacterial growth and new DD infections.

When DD first appeared in my area in 1994 I tried the acid treatment after a fellow trimmer in New England reported good results with it. After three months I discontinued the acid treatment because the reoccurrence rate was over 90 percent. Using acid to treat footwarts is obviously a poor choice. But there is another lesson here. Trimmers who stay current with hoof health issues wouldn't make this type of mistake. And if they did, they would not let something like this go on for any length of time without stopping to ask why.

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