Cleaning Your Horse's Sheath

By Bethany Padgett, Founder, Equiderma.com
Sheath Cleaning 101

Let’s face it. Cleaning your horse’s sheath is not the most pleasant experience…but it must be done.

Many people shy away from it completely, but it is an essential part of being a good caretaker of your horse. Removing the smegma and any beans that may be present inside the head of the penis will not only help your horse feel more comfortable, but will give you a chance to check for sores, ticks and anything else that may need addressing.

Here’s a Q&A on Sheath Cleaning 101.
Bethany Padgett, Founder
www.Equiderma.com

Q: HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CLEAN MY HORSE’S SHEATH?
A: Sheath cleaning does not need to be done more than every 3-6 months. Your horse’s sheath has a population of “friendly” microorganisms that help him maintain a healthy balance within. If you clean the sheath too frequently, you’ll kill these microorganisms and disrupt the natural balance—and your horse’s sheath is likely to get even dirtier, faster. To protect those friendly microorganisms, never use antibacterial soap.

Q: WHAT IS SMEGMA?
A: Glands in the lining of the sheath, called sebaceous glands, produce a secretion called sebum. When this secretion mixes with dirt and sloughing skin cells, it forms a gray to black material called smegma. These secretions build up and accumulate into a soft, wax-like deposit, or create dry, hard flakes that firmly adhere to the skin.

Male horses naturally secrete this waxy, moisture-holding substance inside their sheath chambers, with variations in amount produced, depending on the horse. Combined with dirt, dead skin cells, and sweat, smegma can accumulate into a thick paste.

The smegma and cells that come from the actual penis often cling to it and flake off like yellow parchment-like chips. There are two areas to focus on cleaning:

• The inner walls of the sheath chamber
• The penis itself

“Isn’t smegma the most awful word? Imagine having oil, dirt and crud all conglomerated and sticking tightly where the sun don’t shine, having hooves and not being able to wash it off? It would certainly make me back up to a tree and rub my beautiful tail into a chrysanthemum.” - Bethany
Q: BUT WHAT ABOUT HORSES IN THE WILD?
A: Horses in the wild – Stallions – have opportunities to become sexually erect and potentially breed. This behavior naturally sheds and expels most accumulations.

Domesticated breeding stallions have their penises gently cleaned prior to live cover or artificial semen collection to prevent infections and to keep the sperm free of potential problems for the mare or developing foal.

Removing the sex drive by castration makes them much safer to be around, but it doesn’t allow them to self-clean.

“You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.”
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry – The Little Prince

Q: WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED A "BEAN"?
The “bean” is a common name for a specific collection of smegma in the tip of the penis.
The tube that drains the urine from the bladder is called the “urethra”, and it protrudes slightly from the center of the head of the penis.

Just above the urethra is a recess, a space, called the “urethral fossa”. (In Latin, “fossa” means a depression, or hollow.) This area extends to the left and right over the urethra, making it BEAN shaped. Smegma can accumulate within this space, and has to be manually removed. Hence the term “de-beaning.”

Sometimes there is just a small amount of gray or white waxy substance in the edges, or a few round- to oval-shaped build-ups – small beans. In severe cases, the debris can accumulate to the point that the large mass compresses down onto the tip of the urethra, squashing the opening and making urination painful.

Typically, these horses have a flat spray instead of a stream when urinating. Again, this must be removed manually, and is much easier with the penis extended in a relaxed, tranquilized horse. The beans can become as large as a walnut if neglected.

Below is a picture of 2 beans removed from the head of the same horse’s penis. They are sitting on a 2-inch fence rail. This gives you an idea of how big they can get when sheath cleaning is neglected.

This horse was unable to drop his penis, had an irregular urine stream, and a foul odor coming from his sheath area. He dropped to his knees when these beans were removed.
STEPS TO GETTING YOUR HORSE’S PENIS SPARKLING CLEAN

Okay, let’s Get Started…

1. You will need Equiderma Sheath, Udder and Genital Cleanser and a hose without the spray attachment, set to warm. (If you’re lucky enough to have gotten your horse to drop his penis, a cold blast of water will send it packing.) Some people use a latex glove or a sock turned inside out. Others use their hand so they have a better feel for removing the smegma. Whichever method you choose, lubricate your hand well with the cleanser before you start. You may have to stop during the cleaning process to add more cleanser lubrication to your hand or glove.

2. Add a liberal amount of cleanser on your hand, sock/glove and apply it to the sheath area. By now you will know if your horse is going to cooperate. If so, stand facing your horse's rear on whatever side you are most comfortable with.

Your shoulder and hip should be snug against the horse so that if he makes any move to kick, you’ll know, and be able to back out of the way.

I like to use crossties if the horse is accustomed to it. If not, it’s best to enlist the help of a friend to hold him so you can concentrate on the business at hand.

Begin washing the penis. You’ll feel the smegma and will gently begin to peel it off. If your horse is especially dirty you should apply the sheath cleanser, and leave it on for a few minutes. Smegma can adhere like “super glue.” If you try to pull it off right away, it can be painful for your boy.

Let the cleanser do its job and begin to melt the smegma.

3. Now it’s time to check for a “bean”. Gently push back the top of the penis. You’ll see the “bean,” and if it isn't too large, it will slide out with a little help. If it is large, you'll have to get your finger behind it a little and slide/pull it out with your thumb and forefinger. Remember to rinse thoroughly after this step.

A. Location of the bean in diagram at right.

3A. IF YOUR HORSE HASN’T DROPPED HIS PENIS

If your horse hasn’t dropped, you’ve only been cleaning the inside of the first sheath chamber. You’ll have to go deeper. In this case, you’ll need to go in up to you elbow, so be sure you’re not wearing your Sunday best. This is a messy business.

In the diagram above C, there is a second, secret inner chamber with a small opening about an inch wide. Beyond this is where the penis is hiding. This may seem daunting, but you can do it.

While watching your horse’s reaction, gently reach inside and massage your fingers back and forth around the sides of the penis. Carefully, explore around with your fingers and slide off any smegma you find there.
Use more water and more cleanser as necessary. If you did not check for a bean before, now is the time. Slide you finger under the small pouch at the top of the penis, feeling around for any foreign body.

If you feel a bean, get your finger behind it, and gently remove it. If it is small, it will slide right out. If it is large, you’ll have to get your finger behind it and slide/pull it out with your thumb and forefinger.

4. Now all that's left to do is to rinse the area thoroughly with clean, warm water. If your horse will allow it, run the hose (on semi-slow pressure) up inside his sheath. Slide the hose inside the second chamber and gently jostle it until the water runs clear and no more chunks of smegma are coming out. This last step will loosen any pieces left behind.

GREAT JOB! You’ve learned a crucial lesson in horse husbandry. Next time your horse drops be proud of how bright and shiny everything is down there, and know you’ve done your best to ensure his health and comfort.
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So, that’s it. Seriously! Those are all our rules. Well, except the most important one- treating our customers the way we want to be treated. If you have any questions or if there is anything we can do, please call us at 800-573-1020 or email at: info@equiderma.com. We are always here to help!

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Our new and innovative system will nourish, protect and improve the skin and coat with every application. Your horse’s silky, glow is sure to put a smile in your heart.”

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