

Strangles EAB

Strangles is a highly infectious disease that is caused by a bacterial infection. The bacterium involved is streptococcus equi.

The infection is passed between horses very easily and can survive well in the environment well. It is also easily transmitted by non-direct contact between horses, for example when a person travels from one infected horse to an uninfected horse, it can be transmitted on the person's clothing.

Usual signs of the disease are abscesses in the lymph nodes in the throat. This can be painful and makes the horse very unwell, they usually have high temperatures and may refuse to eat. The abscesses can also cause obstruction of the airways, causing coughing or difficulty breathing.

These abscesses will mature and often burst, internally or externally, leaking pus. The pus is full of bacteria and is extremely infectious should it get onto people's clothing, stable walls and implements.

There are three other potential dangers with a strangles infection.

Bastard strangles

When the abscesses occur throughout the horse's body in the lungs, liver, kidneys and spleen, when these abscesses rupture it can be fatal.

Purpura Haemorrhagica

A consequence of severe internal infection. It causes bleeding from smaller blood vessels can cause red lesions/spots to form on the skin and mucous membranes. It may also cause swelling of the limbs and head. This condition is generally fatal.



Strangles chronic carrier state

Some horses carry the strangles-causing bacteria in the guttural pouch (a pouch at the back of the throat) for months or even years after they have recovered from clinical disease. Carrier horses appear healthy but shed bacteria in nasal discharges and are a source of infection for other horses.

It is really important to make sure there are no carriers in a new yard if you are moving your horse. Or that a new horse being brought into the yard isn't a carrier.

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Tests are available to make sure horses are not carriers. Bloods can be taken and tested for antibodies to strangles bacteria. If present then there are two possibilities. Either the horse is currently carrying infection or it has had the infection before and has immunity. It is sometimes necessary to perform endoscopy of the horse's guttural pouches to confirm which state a horse is in. This can be done under standing sedation.

If a yard contracts strangles infection it is vital that they isolate the horses on the premises from other horses. The animals that are infected should be nursed through the illness. Sometimes they will require antibiotics, mostly they just require NSAID's (bute, danilon) to keep their body temperatures down, and provision of fluids and palatable food.

Once all the horses have recovered from the infection, any horses showing symptoms should have their guttural pouches scoped and flushed to make sure they are clear of infection. All horses not obviously infected should be tested to ensure they haven't contracted the infection. Any horse that receives a positive result on the blood test should also have their guttural pouches scoped.



This is the best way to ensure the strangles infection doesn't spread any further. This process can be lengthy (often several months of isolation) and costly, with multiple laboratory fees and tests necessary. This is another reason why strangles infection should be prevented at all costs.

We would recommend blood testing all new horses for strangles before introducing them to a new yard. It is also sensible to make sure they are isolated for 3 weeks, once on the yard, to rule out any other infections like equine influenza.



Vaccination

There is a vaccination available for the prevention and management of a strangles outbreak. It has a short duration of immunity and is administered by injection into the inside of the horse's lip. For this reason it is used mostly in the prevention and management of outbreaks of the disease rather than routinely in all horses.

The best prevention of a strangles infection is good biosecurity policies, such as blood testing, isolation and biosecurity measures taken on yards and when horses are at shows.

Give us a call if you are worried about strangles or want to arrange for testing.



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