



## Strangles

*Strangles is an acute, highly contagious disease of the upper respiratory tract caused by a bacteria called Streptococcus Equi. It is characterised by a thick, pussy green to yellow nasal discharge, enlarged lymph glands, high temperature and reduced appetite. Sometimes abscessation of the lymph glands occurs, pus will then be draining from these areas underneath the chin, jaw and/or neck. In cases of severe swelling around the jaw, suffocation can ensue.*

Strangles has a world-wide distribution and can occur in horses of any age, although young horses (1-5 years) are more susceptible. Strangles has now overtaken Flu and Herpes as the most common cause of respiratory disease outbreaks in horses. Even though a horse has recovered from Strangles, it can be re-infected later on because immunity is short-lived.

The bacteria are transmitted either by direct contact between infected horse or via carrying agents. They can remain viable for more than a month in bedding, pasture, buckets or other utensils. In addition, horses that appear to have recovered from the disease may shed the bacteria intermittently in nasal secretions for a few weeks up to many months. People handling infected horses or material also spread the disease.

The spread of infection on a yard is variable and can be reduced with good hygiene, isolation of clinically ill horses and in-contact healthy horses. Avoid handling healthy horses after handling isolated horses. The use of a foot bath, wearing protective clothing and washing your hands with antiseptics are all examples of good hygiene measures in case of an outbreak. Ideally, even healthy horses on the yard should not be moved from the premises. Consequently, this also affects competition horses not being able to attend important shows.

The majority of horses recover fully after 3 to 6 weeks and a course of antibiotics. The most common problem seen following infection is the "carrier" state. Complications are infrequent and are usually associated with the spread of infection to other parts of the body, known as 'Bastard Strangles'. Another common and severe complication of strangles is caused by the horse's immune reaction. This disease is called vasculitis and is recognized by severely swollen legs. (Purpura Haemorrhagica)

A presumptive diagnosis is based on clinical signs, but not all horses with snotty noses have Strangles, and not all cases of Strangles have nasal discharge. To confirm the diagnosis, the bacteria must be isolated from nasopharyngeal swabs. Recently many cases of Atypical Strangles have been seen in Essex. Horses with Atypical Strangles have signs that are less severe and fewer horses become ill. The spread of these weaker strains is slower, but the disease is still contagious and occasional horses may still become severely ill.

### How can Strangles be prevented?

- Testing horses by blood sample
- Strict quarantine of new arrivals for at least 2 weeks, ideally 1 month
- Guttural pouch wash
- 3 negative nasal swabs, one week apart, from horses that have apparently recovered from Strangles is the most reliable but expensive way to make sure they are not shedding the bacteria

### What to do in case of an outbreak?

- Call your veterinary surgeon
- Isolate clinically ill horses and treat accordingly
  - Keep in-contact, but healthy horses separate from other horses
  - Put up foot baths and facilities for hand washing
  - Disinfect stables and burn infected bedding
- Use protective clothing if handling both healthy and ill horses

### Remember this:

- The majority of horses make an uneventful recovery
- A horse with nasal discharge and enlarged lymph nodes may have Strangles, but not necessarily, so DO NOT panic
- Do not blame the owner of the first horse to become ill, it might have been YOUR horse shedding the bacteria!
- Blood samples can prevent carrier horses entering your premises

*Bacteria is transmitted either by direct contact or via carrying agents*

