

May 2025 Strangles

Strangles is one of the most common equine contagious diseases diagnosed worldwide. It is endemic in the UK due to the number of horses that are silent 'carriers' of the disease.

These carriers show no outward signs of infection but are still able to spread the disease. These carrier horses can be difficult to identify. It is caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus equi* which can sit in the guttural pouches of a horse for years.

The only way to confirm if a horse is a carrier is to examine and lavage these pouches.

Clinical Signs

- Temperature of over 38.5C
- Coughing
- Lethargy/dull and depressed or just quiet in self.
- Loss of appetite
- Not drinking
- Difficulty swallowing.
- A lowered head and neck.
- Thick and discoloured nasal discharge.
- Swelling of the glands under the jaw (lymph nodes), in the space between the head and neck, or on the head or neck which may lead to abscesses. These can burst with highly infectious, thick, creamy-yellow pus.

Often, we just see a high temperature and a slightly quiet horse for a day or so!

Reducing The Risk:

Whilst at home:

- Vaccinate for strangles.
- Isolate new horses. Ideally a month of isolation away from the rest of the yard
- Test. New horses should be tested for strangles before entering a yard, ideally with a guttural pouch lavage, but a blood test can also be used with its results interpreted carefully.
- Use individual equipment for each horse.
- Routinely disinfected equipment on a regular basis.
- Take horses' temperatures regularly (ideally every day) and isolate any horse that has a temperature of over 38.5C, or that is coughing for an unknown reason and call us

Away from home:

- Use your own buckets, water, feed and grooming kit. If sharing, disinfect between each use.
- Prevent nose to nose contact with other horses.
- Wash hands between handling different horses.
- After an event, all equipment, tack footwear and clothing should be washed and disinfected.

10% of horses affected by strangles become carriers hence it is so important to get the disease investigated correctly!



Vaccination Schedule

1st vaccine

2nd vaccine 4 weeks later

Following vaccines every 6 months

Vaccinations can be given with other vaccines please discuss this with your vet.

The vaccination is now given in to the muscle like other vaccinations.

Treatment

Most horses recover from strangles within 3-4 weeks

The main treatment is supportive care depending on clinical signs and severity of disease

Isolation to prevent spread is key and it is important to wait until testing proves your horse is clear before removing your horse from isolation

If you suspect strangles:

- Isolate affected horse
- Contact your vet
- Monitor all horses in contact including taking temperatures
- Warn anyone coming to the yard including professionals such as farriers and physios
- Prevent movement of any in contact horses off the yard (this may be the whole yard)
- Warn other liverys or horse owners who are on yard

For more information

For a video on how to take temperatures please see our YouTube page:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERR_j-SWzrU

Redwings' information on strangles and strangles week can be found at:

<https://www.redwings.org.uk/strangles>

 **B** Boost immunity with Strangles vaccination

 **E** Engage with trusted information

 **S** Separate unfamiliar horses

 **T** Temperature check routinely



Upcoming events

4th June- Common Causes of lameness at Summerleaze Vets
EX13 7RA 7pm arrival for 7.30pm start

2nd July- Skin and respiratory disease
Curland Equestrian TA3 5SD 7pm arrival for 7.30pm start

Please RSVP to summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk

Spread

Strangles is not spread through the air, but the bacteria can spread when a horse coughs or snorts.

It can be easily spread directly through horse-to-horse contact.

It can also be spread indirectly, for example through contaminated equipment, handler clothing and boots.

Strangles bacteria can survive for up to **six weeks in water!** Hence it is important to take your own water source when away from the yard.