

STRANGLES: A CONTAGIOUS EQUINE DISEASE

What is “strangles?”

Strangles is a highly contagious disease of equids including horses, donkeys and ponies. It is caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus equi*, often abbreviated *Strep. equi*. It is called “strangles” because of the strangled breathing sounds the ill horse makes as a result of profuse nasal discharge and the swellings that form in the head and neck region.

How does it spread?

The disease is spread via **nasal secretions** (snorting, coughing, physical nose-to-nose contact) and pus from draining abscesses. It is also possible for humans to spread the disease through contaminated clothing, hands or equipment, etc. Shared water troughs are a common means of exposure.

What should I do if I have a strangles outbreak in my horses?

Contact your veterinarian, stop horse movement until the outbreak is resolved, and work with your veterinarian to determine a possible need for follow-up visits to check for bacterial shedding.

What should I watch for?

- Typical signs begin with mild lethargy, reduced feed intake, slight cough, nasal discharge and a **fever**.
- In most cases, a few days after the onset of fever and more mild signs, the lymph nodes swell and form **abscesses** around the throat, as well as in some cases under or around the base of the ear.
- At first, the nasal discharge is clear then becomes cloudy and whitish. After the abscesses have ruptured and drained into the nasal passages the discharge usually becomes purulent (thick white to yellow).
- Horses are often seen positioning their head low and extended in order to relieve the throat and lymph node pain.
- Some of the abscesses may rupture through the skin. Be aware that the pus from the nose and draining abscesses is **highly contagious** to other horses. Not all cases develop the “classic” abscess formation. Without complications recovery begins, in most cases, after abscesses drain or infection begins to be resolved by the body.

If I suspect my horse has strangles, what should I do?

The first thing to do is to **isolate** any horse with signs of strangles from other horses. Take temperatures daily of all horses that may have been exposed to strangles. An elevated temperature is the first sign of disease. Contacting your veterinarian to describe the signs being shown by the horse, and get their advice on further management of the horse’s illness including treatment options.

Is there a vaccine against strangles?

At Oakwood, we have found *Pinnacle*, an intranasal vaccine, to be the **most effective** at preventing and reducing the severity of strangles.

How can I minimize the risk of strangles at my facility?

- Have a bio-security policy for people and horses coming onto your operation, and avoid contact with horses of unknown health status or those that are ill.
- Don’t **overstock** your equine facility.
- If new horses are introduced, request a statement by a veterinarian regarding their health status and recent exposure to contagious disease.
- Keep them isolated for a few weeks to observe them for signs of illness.
- Personnel attending to horses must take great care not to move from isolated horses to the other horses on the establishment, without taking appropriate precautions.
- **Don’t share** tack, feed tubs, water containers, trailers, pens or stalls used by horses of unknown health status.
- Special attention should be paid to the water containers that may have been contaminated with pus from ill horses.

Horses with a history of strangles can be tested to determine if they are shedding *Strep. equi*. Oakwood uses Zoologix PCR DNA testing to detect active infections. A simple nasal swab provides **results in 2 business days**.

Summer heat has arrived! Provide plenty of shade and cool water for your horses. Go riding early or late in the day to avoid the sizzling sun. Allow plenty of time to cool your horse down properly after riding.

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Feeling down? Saddle up. ~Author Unknown