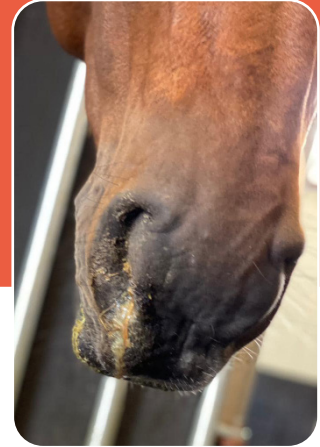


# Fact Sheet

# Strangles

## What is strangles?

Equine strangles is a highly contagious bacterial infection caused by *Streptococcus equi* subspecies *equi*. It primarily affects the upper respiratory tract of horses, causing swollen lymph nodes that can form abscesses. While rarely fatal, it can lead to complications and long-term health issues.



## Transmission

- Direct horse-to-horse contact
- Indirect transmission via contaminated equipment, water, feed, or human handling
- Asymptomatic carriers (horses that have recovered but still harbor bacteria in the guttural pouch)



## Symptoms

- A very high temperature ( $> 103^{\circ}\text{F}$ )
- Swollen or abscessed lymph nodes (especially around the throat and jaw)
- Nasal discharge (initially clear, then thick and yellow)
- Difficulty swallowing and breathing ("strangling" effect)
- Lethargy and loss of appetite
- Extended head and neck due to throat pain

## Diagnosis

- PCR testing: Detects bacterial DNA from nasal swabs, abscess material, or guttural pouch lavage
- Culture testing: Confirms presence of *S. equi*
- Blood tests (ELISA): Detects antibodies (useful for screening carriers)

## Treatment

- Supportive care
- The abscesses may require surgical drainage and lavage
- Antibiotics are usually only used in severe cases or those with complications
- Some horses may need fluid therapy if they are not drinking
- Severe cases may require tracheotomy to enable them to breathe
- Supplementary feeding may be needed by a stomach tube
- If there is infection within the guttural pouches then the pus and/or chondroids within them must be removed in order to eliminate the infection

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## Prevention & Disease Control

### Vaccination – Strangvac

- Strangvac is a recombinant protein-based vaccine designed to reduce the severity and spread of strangles
- Provides protection without the risks associated with live vaccines
- Requires an initial two-dose course (four weeks apart) followed by boosters every 6 months in high-risk environments
- Reduces the risk of clinical disease and bacterial shedding but does not completely prevent infection

### Biosecurity Measures

- Isolate new horses for at least 3 weeks before introducing them to the herd
- Implement strict hygiene protocols (disinfect equipment, change clothing between horses)
- Quarantine infected horses for 4-6 weeks and conduct PCR testing before reintroduction
- Monitor for silent carriers using guttural pouch endoscopy and PCR testing

### Complications

- Bastard strangles: Bacteria spreads to internal organs, forming abscesses
- Purpura hemorrhagica: Immune-mediated reaction causing swelling and hemorrhage
- Chronic carrier state: Horses continue to shed bacteria unknowingly



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This factsheet was created by the VetPartners Equine Team, with assistance from our Marketing Team and Veterinary Regulatory Advisors.

**For further information, please contact your local VetPartners Equine Veterinary Practice on:**

## **vetPartners**

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