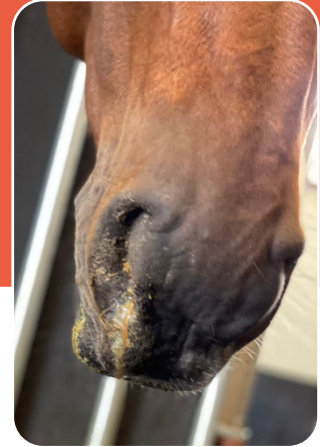


Fact Sheet

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°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

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:

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Together with our practices, our focus is on providing an excellent service to our equine clients. No two practices are the same, and we understand and embrace that independent spirit.