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# Strangles

(*Streptococcus equi equi* infection)

## General Information:

Strangles is a highly contagious upper respiratory tract infection caused by the bacterium, *Streptococcus equi equi*. These bacteria tend to form abscesses, primarily in the lymph nodes of the throat. The bacteria are transmitted by direct contact of infected horses with other horses, or indirectly by flies and contaminated buckets, trailers, stall walls or even you. The bacteria can survive up to 3 months in the outside environment. The bacteria can survive in the water for 1 month and in the horses guttural pouches for up to 3 years. The pus that drains from the abscesses and the nasal discharge (including sneezing) are the infectious routes. Horses can continue to shed the bacteria for 4-6 weeks after clinical signs are gone. A very small percentage of horses become chronic carriers. During this time the horse can infect other horses, but does not show any signs of the disease.

## Vaccination:

Any horse that travels to other ranches or shows, or is around your other horses which travel should be vaccinated every year with the intra-nasal vaccination. Like any vaccination it helps reduce or prevent the disease in most horses but is not completely protective. Vaccinating horses in the face of outbreak is not recommended.

## Clinical signs:

Once exposed it can take 2-14 days before symptoms are obvious (incubation period). Signs: fever (>101 F), lethargy, off feed, depression, nasal discharge, swelling(s) around the jaw/throat area, and/or draining abscesses. Sometimes a horse will stand with his neck and head extended straight out to try to relieve a sore throat.

Abscesses in the submandibular lymph nodes



in the throatlatch area.

Usually purulent nasal discharge is seen.



**Prevention:**

New horses or horses that have travelled to a show should be placed under quarantine for 30 days. Monitor new arrivals temperature (Normal is 99-100.9 F). Some places may require negative nasal swabs before allowing your horse onto their property. You should always take your own water bucket to shows and always practice good hygiene like hand washing. Once a case of Strangles is confirmed no horses should be brought to the property, and no horses should leave the property. Or until the infection has been brought under control. Pastures used to house infected horses should be rested for at least 4 weeks after infected horses are removed. All water buckets, feed tubs, pitch forks, brushes, twitches, etc should be cleaned prior to reusing them on uninfected animals.

**Treatment:**

Any horse with a swelling in the throat/jaw area should immediately be separated from your other horses until your veterinarian can see the horse. Do not share halters, buckets, tack, brushes, etc. The horse with the swelling should be handled and fed last. After working with the horse wash your hands and change clothes to ensure that you don't spread the disease. Remember that other animals like dogs, cats and chickens can spread the disease by going through the stall and picking it up on their feet.

Once the horse is seen by the veterinarian there are several things we can do:

- A nasal swab or culture of abscess can be taken and submitted to a lab to confirm that the horse has Strangles. It takes 2-3 days to get the results.
- A blood test can also be done to measure the titer of the specific protein (SeM) of *S. equi*.
- An ultrasound of the swelling will tell us if the abscess is formed enough to be able to lance it so it can drain. This helps speed up the horses recovery.
- NEVER give antibiotics unless directed to by a veterinarian. Giving antibiotics can cause internal abscesses which are very serious and life threatening.
- Anti-inflammatory medications like Bute or Banamine are often given to help with the fever, sore throat and swelling.
- If we are suspicious of an internal abscess blood work will need to be done and an abdominal ultrasound will be performed.
- Some horses get Strangles bacteria in the guttural pouches, located in the head. These infections are difficult to diagnose and treat. An endoscopic exam (small camera up the nose) is used in these cases. If your horse has Strangles' condroids in the guttural pouches your vet will discuss treatment with you.

**Complications:**

If your horse develops swelling of the limbs and/or small hemorrhages on the gums about 2 weeks after vaccination or recovering from an abscess you should contact your veterinarian. This is an allergic reaction from the exposure to the bacteria called Purpura Hemorrhagica which can be deadly.

