



Coombefield Veterinary Hospital Equine Newsletter August 2015

Strangles

The Disease

Strangles, caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus equi*, 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, showing no outward signs of infection but still able to spread the disease. Currently these carrier horses can be difficult to identify.

Unfortunately there is a stigma about admitting the presence of Strangles on a yard which often slows diagnosis. Strangles is not a notifiable disease, but yards with confirmed outbreaks are strongly advised to implement strict biosecurity precautions to prevent further spread, and to notify neighbouring premises. Being open and honest about an outbreak will help to reduce the spread of disease.

Clinical Signs

The severity of clinical signs can vary between individual horses. Clinical signs are not usually seen until 3-14 days after the horse infection.

Clinical signs include:

- Depression and dullness
- Loss of appetite
- High temperature
- Marked 'snotty' nasal discharge
- Coughing
- Swelling of the lymph nodes (glands) under the jaw or on the head or neck which can lead to abscess formation at a later stage.



It is important to remember that horses can start to spread the disease before the clinical signs appear. When the abscesses in the lymph nodes burst they discharge a highly infectious, thick creamy-yellow pus.

"Atypical" strangles is now a commonly recognised condition, where infected horses display minimal or no clinical signs. The infected horses may exhibit a mild respiratory infection but no abscesses develop. These horses may not be recognised as having strangles signs and therefore go undiagnosed (and are not isolated!)

In approximately 10% of cases infected horses become carriers even though they appear to have recovered. These horses become persistently infected with abscess material in the guttural pouches. The bacteria can survive here for months to years and these horses can continue to spread the disease.

Spread of Infection

Strangles is very contagious but the bacteria causing the disease is relatively easy to kill. The disease is spread by contact only, it is not an airborne disease.

Contact can be either:

1. Direct: nose to nose contact between infected and normal horses or by nasal droplets that can spread up to 10m – so can affect nearby horses or those within the same enclosed airspace.
2. Indirect: via bacteria/mucous on equipment e.g. feed buckets, water troughs, tack, mucking out utensils.
3. Indirect: via bacteria/ mucous on shared personnel e.g. groom, instructor, farrier, vet, yard animals (dogs/cats etc).

Suspected Cases

If you suspect strangles take the following steps immediately:

1. Isolate affected and other horses in direct contact. As much as possible keep all horses in their normal group.
2. Stop all movement of horses on and off the premises.
3. Call your veterinary surgeon to discuss diagnosis, and management.
4. If the diagnosis is confirmed your vet will advise on isolation, treatment and testing to show disease free status.

Prevention/Reducing the Risk

1. **Away from home:**
 - a) Take your own buckets, water, feed and grooming kit. If you do share 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 is washed and disinfected.
2. **At home:**
 - a) All new horses should undergo a three week period of isolation after entry into the premises.
 - b) Blood samples can screen for exposure to Strangles and can be useful to assess risk. Ideally samples should be taken on arrival and at the end of the three-week isolation period to check for seroconversion.
 - c) Record the movement of horses coming and going from the yard.
 - d) Use individual equipment for each horse. All equipment should be routinely disinfected on a regular basis.

Treatment

Treatment varies for each individual case. Individual treatment protocols should be discussed and agreed with your vet.

For more information on detailed isolation and handling procedures please contact our Equine Department for our booklet.



www.facebook.com/CoombeFieldEquineDepartment

EQUINE INFO

If you would like to speak to an Equine vet or arrange a visit, please call 01297 630515

Medicines can be requested via email or by telephone

Email: farm@axvets.co.uk