

6th of August 2002

Strangles has been identified in a local stables. The disease has been positively identified by laboratory culture of the causative bacteria, *Streptococcus equi equi*. The disease is capable of being introduced from an “asymptomatic” carrier – an infected horse that does not develop signs of infection, a state that may last for years.

Strangles is a bacterial respiratory disease of horses. It is contagious but requires fairly close contact.

**Symptoms of strangles** – No signs will be evident for up to 21 days after exposure – the incubation period. The infection is present but with no symptoms.

Begins as nothing more than lethargy. Progression to lumps (abscesses) forming under jaw and throat, respiratory distress and cloudy, usually yellowish respiratory discharge. The abscesses are extremely painful. The abscesses progress to point and then burst. Very occasionally, abscesses may burst internally, leading to “bastard strangles” – with bacteraemia, severe pneumonia and likely death.

Horses having had Strangles, even with antibiotic treatment may remain infectious carriers of Strangles for up to 3 YEARS.

**Treatment** – antibiotics, it was once considered that antibiotics should not be started until after the bursting of the abscesses. Doing so was believed to increase the incidence of “bastard strangles” where all they would do is suppress the abscesses without clearing them. This would lead to actual prolonging of the infection, and leading to a higher fatality rate with abscesses forming in the lungs. This theory has been investigated and found to be incorrect and it is now recommended to commence Penicillin immediately.

Which antibiotic – Penicillin, full dose twice daily for at least 10 days.

#### **Vaccination.**

NOTE – the protection to be gained from the initial course of Strangles vaccine takes 10 – 14 days minimum to develop. This is longer than time taken for the infection to gain hold so WILL NOT protect against infection picked up before the vaccination is administered or even for infections picked up several days after). Strangles vaccination is not a sure thing and it should not be trusted to be fully protective.

**Initial program** – never vaccinated for anything

Tetanus/Strangles -> 14days -> Strangles -> 14 days -> Tetanus/Strangles

Then annual Tetanus/Strangles boosters.

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Strangles or Tetanus/Strangles -> 14 days -> Strangles -> 14 days -> Strangles

Then annual Tetanus/Strangles boosters.

#### **Horses with “current cover”**

One single booster shot will produce a rapid increase in the protective antibodies. This should be done if it is greater than 6 months since the initial course or a booster.

**Warning** – Strangles vaccination is associated with a relatively high incidence of local tissue reaction with swelling and soreness.

#### **Salient Points**

- Up to 21 days incubation (exposure to signs of infection)

- Initial vaccination cover takes 10 – 14 days to give protection.
- Vaccination does not offer total protection.
- Infected horses may remain carriers for up to 3 years.

