

STRANGLES (STREPTOCOCCUS EQUI) QUICK FACTS

General Facts

Strangles is a very common and highly infectious bacterial infection. It is the most frequently diagnosed upper respiratory disease in horses 6-10 years of age.¹



- Abscess-forming bacterial infection—often appears as enlarged, swollen and tender lymph nodes around the horse's head
- Spread through direct contact, contaminated surfaces, food and water sources
- Infected horses can spread disease without showing clinical signs, and can be a source of infection for an undetermined period of time.
- Horses are more likely to be infected and develop more severe clinical disease at a young age
- Commonly diagnosed in adult horses, though clinical signs may not be as severe
- Incubation period 3-14 days
- Rarely fatal

Watch for These Signs

- ⚠️ Fever (may precede other signs by 24-48 hours)
- ⚠️ Abscesses in throatlatch and below the jaw (the mandibular lymph nodes)
- ⚠️ Nasal discharge (often thick white/yellow mucus)
- ⚠️ Swelling of the throat
- ⚠️ Difficulty swallowing
- ⚠️ Wheezing
- ⚠️ Cough



- ⚠️ In rare cases with complications:
 - Purpura hemorrhagica—bleeding from the capillaries which causes red spots on the mucous membranes and swelling of the limbs and head
 - Swelling of muscles
 - Abscesses spread to other parts of the body—known as bastard strangles

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is often performed with a nasal swab or pus from abscesses submitted to a laboratory for bacterial culture or polymerase-chain reaction (PCR) testing.



Treatment and Recovery

- Supportive care is the primary treatment
- In severe cases antibiotics may be used, but most horses recover without antibiotic treatment
- Horses usually recover fully in 3 to 4 weeks with few complications
- Recovered horses can become carriers and shed the bacteria intermittently
- Infected horses may develop long-term immunity



Biosecurity

Strangles outbreaks are common and can be hard to prevent because of the prevalence of horses who can silently shed disease. Proper biosecurity is key to preventing and managing disease spread.

- **Isolate** all new entries or horses returning to the stable from travel
- **Avoid nose-to-nose contact** with other horses



- **Check temperatures** at least once and preferably twice daily (Normal = 99°F - 101°F)
- **Isolate** any horse with elevated temperature and/or occurrence of unprovoked coughing
- **Do not share** tack, water buckets, or feed sources
- **Practice good hand hygiene** (hand sanitizers in absence of soap and water)
- **Clean and disinfect** hauling equipment like trailers after each use



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

www.equinediseasecc.org/disease-information
www.AAEP.org/guidelines
www.aphis.usda.gov

Talk to your veterinarian if you're concerned about strangles.

¹ Surveillance programme for important equine infectious respiratory pathogens in the USA. N. Pusterla, P.H. Kass, S. Mapes, C. Johnson, D.C. Barnett, W. Vaala, et al. *Vet Rec* 2011.



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