

Strangles: A Disease You Should Know About!

By Hannah Mueller, DVM

Strangles is a highly contagious bacterial infection (*Strep equi equi*) that affects horses; and although it is rare in general, there have been more outbreaks than normal in our area this year.

The disease is not usually fatal but more than half of exposed horses will become sick. Clinical signs include high fever, nasal discharge, swollen lymph nodes that abscess in the jowl or throatlatch area and resulting difficulty in swallowing.

Brushes, clothing/boots, wheelbarrows, tack etc. contaminated with nasal discharge from an infected horse can spread the disease so quarantine of all horses potentially exposed is essential to prevent strangles from spreading.

Usually an exposed horse starts showing clinical signs of infection within 2-6 days but it can take up to two weeks for signs to appear. Horse can be carriers and not show clinical signs for as long as 6 weeks (or in rare cases even longer), so a minimum 6 week quarantine of all exposed horses is recommended. Additionally, all horses who contracted strangles should have a negative culture showing they are not shedding the bacterium once the disease has resolved before being let off quarantine.

If you suspect your horse has been exposed, quarantine immediately and take temperatures twice daily. A temperature spike is often the first sign of infection. Support your horse's immune system by providing a low stress environment, blanketing in cold weather, vitamin C or Echinacea supplementation, etc. Vaccination for strangles has serious potential side effects and horses should not be vaccinated in the face of exposure.

Quarantine is the best method of controlling a strangles outbreak, however if a horse must be taken into an area that has had a Strangles outbreak, it is best to vaccinate them for it at least 2 weeks prior to exposure.

Call your veterinarian with any questions or if your horse's fever spikes over 102.

For more information see: www.aaep.org