

EQUINE PREVENTATIVE CARE | VET RESOURCES

STRANGLES

WHAT IS STRANGLES?

Strangles is a highly contagious respiratory disease of horses that is caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus equi* subspecies *equi* (commonly referred to as 'Strep equi'). The disease is highly infectious and can easily and rapidly spread from horse to horse.^{1,2} The strangles bacteria is spread by direct contact with the horse's nasal discharge, pus from discharging abscesses, or even the infected horse coughing on another horse. Bacteria can also spread to an uninfected horse via contaminated objects such as people's hands, clothing or even equipment such as halters, water buckets and feed bins.²

Common clinical signs of Strangles may include: nasal discharge, fever, difficulty swallowing, loss of appetite, depression, coughing and laboured breathing due to enlarged lymph nodes. These distressing clinical signs can persist for days or weeks. Most horses recover, but they may need to be isolated for 6 to 8 weeks to avoid infecting other horses.³

HOW DOES MY HORSE GET STRANGLES?

Strangles is seen more commonly in younger horses, generally less than five years old, particularly in environments where there are a lot of horses mingling together, such as weaning time, horse sales, or at breaking-in establishments.⁴

Young horses typically have lower levels of immunity to the strangles bacterium than older horses, and when new horses are mixed together, the stress levels increase in these young horses, further decreasing the strength of their immune system and making them more susceptible to disease. The more horses are allowed to intermingle with other horses, the more risk there is that one will introduce the disease.⁴

HOW OFTEN DOES THE VACCINE NEED TO BE GIVEN?



*Boosters every 6 months are recommended for horses at high risk.

Your foal can be given Equivac® S or Equivac® 2in1 vaccination from three months of age. Initially, it is given as three doses no less than two weeks apart, followed by annual boosters to maintain immunity.

MY HORSES DON'T LEAVE MY PROPERTY, DO THEY STILL HAVE TO GET VACCINATED? CAN THEY GET STRANGLES FROM HOME?

Yes, horses may still be vulnerable to infection and can contract strangles without even leaving your property. Infection is caused by either inhaling or ingesting the *S equi* bacteria that they pick up from other infected horses, or from handlers, contaminated yards, water troughs, and equipment such as leads, head collars, buckets etc. – all items that are found at home.⁴

DO THEY REALLY HAVE TO BE VACCINATED EVERY 6-12 MONTHS?

Yearly boosters are required to maintain an adequate level of immunity, however, increased protection against strangles may be obtained by giving booster doses more frequently, for example every six months. It is the recommendation of the Equine Infectious Diseases Advisory Board that ALL horses receiving strangles vaccine receive boosters every 6 months.

WHY IS A STRANGLES VACCINE DIFFERENT TO A HUMAN VACCINE, WHICH LASTS A LIFETIME?

All vaccines are not the same. The period of protection and degree of protection afforded by a vaccine is unique to each vaccine. With respect to strangles, even natural infection with strangles does not provide lifetime protection against future infections, so it is unrealistic to expect a vaccine to provide superior protection.

With human vaccination, most of the diseases in question are diseases of childhood, and there is also a heavy reliance on 'herd immunity' where diseases are kept in check by the sheer numbers of people being vaccinated during the most susceptible phases of life. It is worth noting that of recent times we have seen re-emergence of some human diseases where vaccination rates have reduced.

Less than 15% of horses in Australia are vaccinated, so we see very little benefit from herd immunity in the equine world.



SEE YOUR VET AND VACCINATE TODAY

Visit www.health4horses.com.au for more information on Strangles

1. Strategy to Eradicate and Prevent Strangles (STEPS). The British Horse Society, Scotland, 2011.

2. Biosecurity NSW. PrimeFact 648, Third Edition, May 2012. NSW Department of Industry and Investment. www.industry.nsw.gov.au

3. Queensland Horse Council Inc. Strangles Fact Sheet, May 2010.

4. Equestrian Life, Untangling Strangles, May 2016