

Because we cannot possibly speak individually to the dozens of people who are calling each day asking for advice regarding the presence of *Streptococcus equi equi* bacterial infection (more commonly known as Strangles, after the swellings under the jaw that sometimes occur during the disease course) in horses residing in Lewis County, we have compiled some of the guidelines and information compiled by the ACVIM (American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine). Below is a synopsis of symptoms, vaccination, and quarantine protocols.

So far our practice has been asked to examine three horses with abscesses or nasal discharge suspicious of Strangles. Two of these owners allowed us to test for specific diseases and both of them came back with a confirmed positive test for *Streptococcus equi equi*, which confirms presence of Strangles. Both horses are currently feeling normal, with no more fever.

Our recommendation to these horse owners has been to keep the horses isolated, and to not allow any movement of horses to or from the property where they are housed for 6 weeks AFTER the complete resolution of clinical signs (drainage from nose or abscesses). The majority of horses are no longer shedding bacteria after 6 weeks. About 75% of horses who develop the infection will have good immunity going forward. The length of this immunity varies greatly, but is generally believed to be several years or more. If disease is going to develop, it will be within 3-7 days of exposure; if you believe your horse may have been in contact with an infected horse or property, one week quarantine is a good idea to ensure you are not traveling with a sick horse.

Most adult horses have had some exposure to Strangles and may have some natural immunity to the illness. This immunity can start to wane as horse gets older, so the most commonly seen cases are in younger horses (under 7) and older horses.

There is a vaccine available for Strangles; it is not a perfect vaccine, in the sense that a horse who is vaccinated can still get sick if high enough exposure occurs, but illness that does occur in the face of vaccination is generally much less severe than in a naive horse. Please keep in mind that the Strangles vaccine is not without potential complication. We do not recommend that horses suspected of coming down with Strangles be vaccinated, nor do we recommend vaccination for horses who are known to have had the illness unless an M-protein titer for *Streptococcus equi equi* has been tested and found to be below a certain level. This test has a 2-5 day turnaround time and the cost through our clinic is \$98. Vaccination in a horse with a high titer or a brewing infection can cause rare but potentially fatal complications such as Bastard Strangles (infection in internal organs) and Purpura Hemorrhagica (widespread inflammation of blood vessels). If a horse has no known exposure to sick animals, vaccination as prevention can be helpful. Full vaccination involves two vaccines, 6 weeks apart, for horses that have never had the Strangle vaccine before. One annual vaccine is needed thereafter to remain current.

Symptoms of Strangles are varied; many horses will develop heavy nasal discharge, or swellings under the jaw or chin or on the face that may or may not rupture externally. All horses will have a fever, and often act lethargic, before they begin nasal discharge or abscess growth. It is for this reason that horses in barns with affected animals can be identified BEFORE they become contagious if temperatures are being taken every day. Fevers will rise, usually above 103 F, for 3-5 days before contagious discharge develops. We recommend each horse with a fever be isolated and treated as infectious. The disease is spread through the mucous or secretions from abscesses, nose contact from horse to horse, left on fencing/walls/trailers/buckets, carried on clothing, grooming equipment, lead ropes, bridles, or in water. The bacteria is susceptible to most disinfectants, including a 10:1 water to bleach solution.

Most of the time, the disease course is about one week, plus time for ruptured wounds under the jaw/chin to heal, and there are no long lasting ill effects. Complications of Strangles can be serious, including airway narrowing due to pressure from abscesses that will not rupture, spread to internal organs, or massive vasculitis (blood vessel inflammation). Fortunately these complications occur in only a minority of cases. It is estimated that up to 10% of horses who have been infected have a contamination of their guttural pouch, which may not cause disease in that particular horse, but which can intermittently shed the bacterial into the environment causing new infections. These horses are very difficult to identify. The gold standard for ensuring a horse is not harboring sub-clinical bacteria is three consecutive nasal swabs that come back negative, spaced 2-3 weeks apart. The cost for this test is \$84. It is not realistic to test every single horse in the world three times, however maybe if we did we could eliminate Strangles entirely!! The vast majority of horses will be no longer contagious after 6 weeks, which is why this is the recommended quarantine period.

If your horse develops a fever, snotty nose, swelling or wounds under the jaw or chin, and you would like to have him tested, the cost, in addition to the physical exam fee, is \$84 to check specifically for *Streptococcus equi equi*.

If you are wondering if you should continue your horse activities in the coming weeks and months, please ensure your horses have not been in contact with any horses that have become sick in the 6 weeks prior. You will have to rely on your fellow horsemen to tell you if their horses have been sick or have been in close contact with sick horses. You should also check with the owner of the premises where you intend to ride to ensure they have no sick horses residing there or have had no sick horses in the last 6 weeks. Chances are if your horse is not sick, and you are going to a property that has not housed sick horses you will be fine. Please follow more strict than usual infectious disease protocol during this "outbreak" time. This includes not letting other horses tie to your trailer, using only your own buckets and tack/grooming supplies, do not let your horse touch noses with horses from other properties, and do not let your horse nose/sniff/lick fences, walls, trailers, etc that are not on your property.

Below are some links to articles you may find useful. Keep in mind that opinions of veterinarians are varied, and often depend on the type of horse population in which they practice. If you are worried your horse may be sick and would like a physical exam or lab test done, please contact our office.
(360)-736-3361

<http://www.thehorse.com/articles/34919/strangles-dispelling-the-myths>

<http://www.thehorse.com/articles/19932/strangles-management-and-prevention>