



EQUINE STRANGLES IN ANTELOPE VALLEY

Strangles, or *Streptococcus equi*, has been circulating among Antelope Valley horse boarding facilities

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT EQUINE STRANGLES

1. What is Strangles?

Strangles, or *Strep. equi*, is a bacterial infection that affects horses, donkeys, and mules. Strangles is very contagious and can have serious complications or even fatal outcomes. Strangles is not a disease to ignore or accept as commonplace. Outbreaks of strangles, even if all cases are uncomplicated, are expensive for both the individual horse owner and the property owner (veterinary bills, disinfection and quarantine costs, damage to show season, loss of training time, damage to facility reputation).

2. What are some signs of Strangles?

Fever, off feed, depression, snotty nose (at first clear watery discharge that soon turns to thick, yellow discharge), difficulty swallowing, swellings underneath jaw and on throat that eventually burst and become draining abscesses.

3. What are some complications of Strangles?

“Bastard strangles” and Purpura haemorrhagica are two severe and often fatal complications of strangles. In “bastard strangles” the infection spreads internally throughout the body. Purpura haemorrhagica is a problem with the immune system.

4. How is Strangles passed between horses?

Infected horses shed the bacterium that causes strangles in their nasal discharge and in the pus from draining abscesses. Infection can pass from horse to horse by:

- **Direct contact.** A healthy horse is exposed to a horse infected with strangles. The bacteria is transmitted in nasal secretions (nose-to-nose or via sneezing/coughing) and pus from draining abscesses. The diseased horse could be incubating strangles, actively showing signs of strangles, or recovering from a strangles infection.
- **Indirect contact.** Contaminated equipment, such as water buckets or

troughs, feed, stalls, fences, tack, and pitchforks, can spread the bacterium that causes strangles. A person handling an infected horse can carry the organism on clothing, boots, or unwashed hands. Flies can also transmit the bacterium.

5. For how long is an infected horse able to pass Strangles to another horse?

Approximately 20% of horses shed the bacteria for a month after all clinical signs are gone (i.e. they seem healthy). Rarely, a horse becomes persistently infected despite the appearance of health and these horses are capable of infecting others even years after the onset of illness.

6. Once a horse develops Strangles can it get the disease again?

Approximately 75% of horses will develop lasting immunity to strangles once they've been infected. However, this means that 1 in 4 do not develop lasting immunity and may develop the disease in the future if exposed to the *Strep. equi* bacterium.

PREVENTION

- Require strangles vaccines for current boarders and incoming horses new to the facility.
- Quarantine new horse arrivals for two weeks. If you do not have a separate quarantine stall area, place the new horse in a stall with empty stalls on either side.
- Avoid mingling with other horses at shows and other events
- Avoid sharing water buckets and equipment
- Provide clean, dry housing.
- Practice good sanitation.

CONTROL

Isolation of affected horses and excellent sanitation are key in controlling outbreaks. No horses, regardless of how healthy they seem, should be allowed to enter or leave the affected property during an outbreak. Vaccination of healthy animals during an outbreak can decrease illness, but in this situation only a killed vaccine should be used. Check with your veterinarian as to what vaccine he or she recommends.

Isolation Measures

Isolate infected horses as soon as possible. A fever of 103 F – 106 F is one of the first signs of strangles. Check the temperature of all seemingly healthy horses daily and isolate any animal with a fever.

Allow as few people as possible into the isolation area. Post brightly colored signs to warn others to stay away from the infected horses.

Keep infected horses isolated for at least another 4 weeks after they seem healthy.

Sanitation measures

During an outbreak, never share equipment between horses

Disinfect water troughs daily

Post signs prohibiting nose-petting on the property until the outbreak is over

Use foot-baths or spray bottles to disinfect shoes

Always finish your work with healthy animals before handling infected horses

Pastures used to hold infected animals should be rested for 4 weeks

****It is required by law to report outbreaks of strangles or any infectious disease to LA County Veterinary Public Health at (562) 401-7088. We will work with you to mitigate the outbreak at your stable and prevent its spread to other facilities****