

## *How can I minimize the risk of strangles at my facility?*

- Have a biosecurity policy for people and horses coming onto your operation and avoid contact with horses of unknown health status or those that are ill.
- Don't overstock your equine facility.
- If new horses are introduced, request a statement by a veterinarian regarding their health status and recent exposure to contagious diseases. Keep them isolated for a few weeks to observe them for signs of illness.
- Personnel attending to horses must take precautions to not move from isolated horses to the other horses on the establishment.
- Don't share tack, feed tubs, water containers, trailers, pens, or stalls used by horses of unknown health status.
- The organism is not thought to have extended persistence in the environment; however the exact duration of persistence is not known. Surfaces that are nonporous can be cleaned with soap and water, rinsed and then disinfected. Consult with your veterinarian regarding how best to disinfect surfaces in an equine facility. Special attention should be paid to the water containers that may have been contaminated with pus from ill horses.
- Horses with a history of strangles can be tested to determine if they are shedding *Strep. equi*. Ask your veterinarian about the need for such testing of new arrivals.

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More in depth information  
available from the ACVIM

<http://www.acvim.org>

ACVIM Consensus Statement on Strangles

[http://www.acvim.org/uploadedFiles/Consensus\\_Statements/Strangles.pdf](http://www.acvim.org/uploadedFiles/Consensus_Statements/Strangles.pdf)

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# “STRANGLES”



## A Contagious Equine Disease

### *What is “strangles?”*

Strangles is a highly contagious disease of equids including horses, donkeys, and ponies. It is caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus equi*, often abbreviated *Strep. equi* or *S. equi*. It is called “strangles” because of the strangled breathing sounds the ill horse makes as a result of profuse nasal discharge and the swellings that form in the head and neck region.

### ***How serious is it?***

Most animals are fully recovered from strangles in 2 to 4 weeks. Although enduring immunity against re-infection is variable – in some equids it can last for years. However, not all horses develop a protective immunity upon recovery. Some horses, although they appear healthy, shed the bacteria for a prolonged period and can infect nearby horses. Horses can die from strangles due to asphyxiation or “strangling”, as well as from other complications.

### ***How common is strangles?***

Because strangles is highly contagious it spreads rapidly from animal to animal, and is one of the more common bacterial infections of horses.

### ***How does it spread?***

The disease is spread via nasal secretions (snorting, coughing, physical nose-to-nose contact) and pus from draining abscesses. It is also possible for humans to spread the disease, through contaminated clothing, hands or equipment etc.

### ***What should I do if I have a strangles outbreak in my horses?***

Contact your veterinarian, stop horse movement until the outbreak is resolved, and work with your veterinarian to determine a possible need for follow-up visits to check for bacterial shedding.

### ***What should I watch for?***

Typical clinical signs begin with mild lethargy, decreased appetite, slight cough, nasal discharge and a fever. A higher than normal rectal temperature in adults is over 100.5°F or in foals over 101.5°F .

In most cases, a few days after the onset of fever and more mild signs, the lymph nodes swell and form abscesses around the throat, as well as in some cases under or around the base of the ear.

At first, the nasal discharge is clear then becomes cloudy and whitish. After the abscesses ruptured and drained into the nasal passages the discharge usually becomes thick white to yellow.



Horses are often seen positioning their heads low and extended in order to relieve the throat and lymph node pain.

Abscesses may rupture through the skin. Be aware that the pus from the nose and draining abscesses is highly contagious to other horses. Not all cases develop the “classic” abscess formation.



Without complications, recovery typically begins after abscesses drain or the infection begins to be resolved by the body.

### ***If I suspect my horse has strangles, what should I do?***

The first thing to do is to isolate any horse with signs of strangles from other horses.

Supportive care of the animal includes:

- Keep the horse dry and protected from extreme cold or heat
- Provide soft, palatable feed
- Monitor horse’s body temperature
- Contact your veterinarian to describe the signs being shown by the horse and get their advice on further management of the horse’s illness, including treatment options
- Apply hot compresses to abscesses to promote rupture and drainage

### ***Finally, if complications arise***

.....such as purpura, internal abscesses, or muscle problems, the best course of action is to contact your veterinarian for assistance.

### ***Is there a vaccine against strangles?***

Yes, there are several different vaccines and they can be used to help protect horses from strangles. However, they do not fully protect every horse. Discuss vaccination as an option with your veterinarian to determine if the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks and cost.