

# FOREST HOUSE VETERINARY SURGERY

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Equine Animal Newsletter

October 2004

## New Strangles Vaccine

There is a new vaccine about to be released that protects horses and ponies from the nasty respiratory tract infection caused by *Streptococcus equi*. The disease is also given the ridiculous name 'Strangles' – see below!

As I write this we have just received a laboratory report on a nasal swab from a pony. It had a nasal discharge, a temperature and was unwell. The laboratory confirmed the disease on the yard. **This is the third yard on our books that has experienced the disease this year.**

## Streptococcus equi

This bacteria causes a respiratory tract infection.

Unlike Herpes and Flu this is a **bacterial** infection and so, in the main IS TREATABLE (unlike Flu and Herpes).

The disease is fairly common and appears to be increasing in prevalence in the UK. This year would be no exception.

It is usually given the ridiculous name 'Strangles'.

**Where there are horses there will be strangles bacteria.**

**Recovered animals may shed it for THREE years infecting other horses unknowingly.**

This highly contagious disease is spread by direct contact between horses and ponies. It can also be spread via grooming kits, clothing, buckets, vermin and tack. It survives well on wood – 48 to 63 days.

The disease manifests as a nasal discharge, with a temperature and often the horse may be depressed. Incubation is 4 – 10 days and recovery may take up to 4 weeks during which time your horse may be unable to work.

Antibiotics are usually given, though a minority of vets believe that they should not be.

Complications are **rare** but occasionally the lymph nodes around the throat become very enlarged and burst expressing some pus. This sounds more alarming than it actually is!

In **extremely rare** cases abscesses form throughout the body. This was more common in the days before antibiotics and was given the ludicrous name 'Bastard Strangles'.

The disease is not a notifiable disease (such as Foot and Mouth) so there are no laws stating you should stop all movements on and off a yard that has a confirmed case (See below for management of a case/outbreak).

A new horse entering a yard is just as likely to pick up the infection from a carrier animal on the yard, as it is to bring it onto the yard. Horses may pick up the infection at shows and events and bring it back onto a yard.

There is no test to see whether a horse is a carrier.

Like 'the common cold' in the human population the winter months are the most common time for infections to spread.

So **now** is a good time to consider vaccinating your horse against strangles.

Most of you vaccinate against Flu and many of you, especially the Loyalty Plan clients, sensibly vaccinate against Herpes, **which is now more common than Flu**. You should seriously consider vaccinating against Strep equi now that there is a vaccine available.

## Is my pony or horse at risk from Strep equi ?

High risk horses and ponies are those that come into contact with different horses on a regular basis – for example on livery and racing yards. If your horse competes, is shown, hunts or attends riding clubs it can pick up the bacteria.

### The vaccine

The vaccine is a very small injection that is given, unusually, in to the inside of your horse's upper lip.

The initial course consists of two injections given 4 weeks apart. This gives 3 months protection from strangles. Provided your horse receives a booster dose within 6 months, there is no need to repeat the initial course.

#### Vaccination Protocol

**High risk horses should receive a booster dose every 3 months.**

**Normal risk horses should receive a booster dose every 6 months. If they may have been in contact with the infection and it has been more than 3 months since the last vaccination against strangles, then they should be given a booster dose immediately.**

The vaccine can be given to all healthy horses over 4 months of age except pregnant or lactating mares.

We know there will be huge demand for this vaccine so ring the practice soon and reserve a vaccine – it will be available at the end of this month.

### Management / Prevention of outbreaks of respiratory disease.

Ring us or chat to us at routine vaccinations/health checks about how to control these diseases.

- **Vaccinate as many horses as possible with Flu, Herpes and S. equi vaccines.** The bigger the population of vaccinated animals the less chance these diseases have to get a hold. Vaccination programmes have been shown to be extremely successful.
- Isolate all horses that have shown signs until at least four weeks after the signs have resolved.
- Prevent movement of personnel, equipment and tack etc between infected

animals and between infected and potentially un-infected horses.

- Place buckets of disinfectant at strategic locations and provide protective clothing and wellies for personnel dealing with cases. The clothing can either be washed off or placed in the washing machine immediately after handling a suspected case. Phenolic disinfectants are the most effective for equipment and areas contaminated with organic matter. Hibiscrub can be used for hand washing and for washing off protective clothing.
- Burn infected bedding and control vermin, dogs and chickens etc.
- Discourage horses from entering and leaving the premises.
- Inform people entering and leaving the premises of the risks and ask them to don protective clothing on arrival and disinfect before leaving.
- If you attend a yard that has a horse with a nasal discharge, and you are worried about taking the infection home to your own horses, simply wash your hands with soap and water, change your clothes before seeing to your own horses. If you are very concerned, have a shower before putting on your clean clothes.
- Isolate all horses entering a yard for at least two weeks. Look for runny noses and listen for coughs.
- Isolate all respiratory cases as soon as they become apparent.

*We realise some of these recommendations may be difficult to implement practically but for the health and welfare of horses you must try to do your best.*

#### Remember.....

Your horse is just as likely to be a carrier animal as another person's horse or pony.

Strangles is a stupid name for a fairly common bacterial disease.

**If you see a horse with a runny nose apply huge dollops of common sense. Many people get runny noses! Know the facts, be understanding, sensible and logical and ring us for a chat.**

***Vaccines are available. For the welfare of your horse or pony – use them.***