



Northeast Pennsylvania Equine Clinic, L.L.C.

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STRANGLES

Strangles is a disease which only affects horses and is caused by the bacteria, Streptococcus equi. Strangles is characterized by sudden onset of fever, loss of appetite and watery nasal discharge which is followed by a thick heavy pus-containing nasal discharge and swelling of the lymph nodes between the jaws and in the throatlatch region. Typically, the lymph nodes become hot and painful and abscess, breaking open and draining pus 7-14 days after the first signs of the disease. The name strangles was coined because horses that were not treated often looked and sounded as though being strangled as abscessing lymph nodes became massively enlarged, obstructing the throat.

Strangles can occur in horses of any age, although one to five-year olds are more at risk. The disease is spread through inhalation or ingestion of nasal discharges or draining pus directly from infected animals, or indirectly from feed and water troughs, equipment, personnel, etc. Signs of strangles appear 3 to 8 days after exposure. The course of the disease varies from 10 to 21 days.

Treatment depends on the state of the disease in an individual horse. Horses with early signs, *before* abscess formation, may be treated with penicillin. Failure of penicillin therapy to curtail the disease is often the result of improper timing of treatment, inadequate dosing, or inadequate duration of treatment. Horses with lymph node abscessation should be hot packed. Ichthammol may also then be applied. “Ripe” abscesses may be lanced and flushed with a dilute antiseptic solution. Penicillin given to horses with abscesses will prolong the course of the disease and may lead to spread of the infection to other body areas, especially the lungs and abdomen, known as “bastard strangles”.

Other complications from strangles include secondary pneumonia, purpura hemorrhagica and guttural pouch empyemia. Up to 10% of horses affected with strangles develop complications and die.

To help you control the spread of strangles, here are some facts you should know:

- Strangles is highly contagious.
- Horses can spread the infection for at least 4 weeks after an attack.
- Strep equi can survive in the environment for about one month after the affected horse is removed.
- Strong immunity occurs immediately after an attack, but reinfection is possible in as little as six months.

Northeast PA Equine Clinic recommends the following specific measures:

- Promptly isolate infected animals far enough away from healthy horses to prohibit contact via coughing and sneezing.
- Use a basin of disinfectant, such as 1 part Clorox to 9 parts water, for dipping handler's boots after exiting contaminated stalls.
- Designate a pair of coveralls or a long sleeve shirt and hang up outside the stall of the sick horse and put on before caring for the sick horse and take off before handling healthy horses.
- Disinfect contaminated stall, buckets, brushes, etc. with dilute Clorox (mixed as above) or other suitable disinfectant.
- Dispose of bedding away from other horses.
- Vaccinate herdmates and other horses that are likely to be exposed to infected horses as recommended by your veterinarian.
- Quarantine your own barn, not allowing horses on or off the premises, from the beginning of any of the signs of strangles through one month *after* the last sick horse has recovered.