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Strangles

'Strangles' is a bacterial infection of the upper respiratory tract of horses, donkeys and mules. The bacteria is known as *Streptococcus equi* subspecies *equi*.

After entering the body by mouth or nose, the bacteria can move to lymph nodes in the throat and abscesses can form in the lymph nodes and guttural pouches.

Clinical signs start 4-14 days after exposure. These signs are depression, reduced appetite and fever. Then followed by swollen warm and painful lymph nodes and clear to yellow nasal discharge. The pain in the throat can make a sick horse stand with head and neck extended. Abscesses eventually rupture and drain and heal in 3-4 weeks.

Transmission

Infected horses start 'shedding' bacteria into the environment after 4 days for usually 4-6 weeks. 25% of horses continue to shed bacteria for years after getting better, these are 'carriers'.

Strangles is passed from horse to horse by direct nose/mouth contact, being aerosolised or indirectly through contaminated water buckets, pasture or feed etc. In mild conditions the bacteria can live on surfaces for up to 9 weeks.

Infected horses without symptoms 'carriers' are usually responsible for outbreaks on properties.

Who is affected?

Any age horse can be affected, however the youngest and unvaccinated are more susceptible.

In an outbreak up to 100% of horses may be infected causing disease, however the incidence of death is low at 10%.

Treatment and Prevention

Varies with the stage of infection of the horse and will be decided by your veterinarian, typically medical and surgical therapies. Prior protection by vaccination will reduce the severity of disease in affected horses. Additionally identifying 'carrier' horses can prevent a breakout.

Always quarantine all new horses to your property for 3 weeks.

Complications

Abscesses in other parts of the body 'bastard strangles' and acute vasculitis are severe complications seen in 1-2% of strangles cases.