



Strangles of horses

Chris Mayberry, District Veterinary Officer, Department of Agriculture, Midland

Strangles is an infectious bacterial disease of horses. While it is more common in younger animals it may affect any age group which has not been previously exposed.

The causative organism, *Streptococcus equi*, is relatively resistant to environmental degradation and cold wet conditions favour its spread. Contaminated premises may remain infectious for several weeks after the last case and affected animals are infectious for 4 or more weeks after infection.

Clinical course of the disease

- Infection may be by inhalation or ingestion.
- The incubation period varies from 2-15 days but is more usually 3-6 days.
- Onset of signs is sudden, with loss of appetite, fever of up to 41°C (106°F) and a slight cough.
- Inflammation of the upper respiratory tract makes swallowing painful within a day or two and the head may be extended to ease the pain
- A watery discharge from the nose soon becomes copious and purulent
- Swelling of the lymph nodes around the head and neck progresses to abscessation and rupture with large quantities of creamy yellowish-white pus at about 10-14 days.

Chronic inflammation of the guttural pouches or sinuses sometimes occurs, and sometimes the infection attacks the muscle and lining of the heart. Spread of the infection throughout the body, particularly the abdomen and thorax, is known as "bastard strangles".

Treatment

- Antibiotics prescribed by a veterinarian should be commenced as soon as possible to limit the development of abscesses.
- Complete rest and nursing care should be provided.
 - Isolate infected animals immediately
 - Provide warm, well ventilated shelter and a blanket if necessary
 - Provide soft, moist, palatable feed
 - Gently clean the eyes and muzzle several times a day, removing accumulations of purulent material

Steam inhalations will ease breathing
Hot packs over the abscesses may speed their progress - when mature they should be lanced and drained
Severely affected animals may require intravenous fluid therapy and feeding by stomach tube

- Stalls should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected along with buckets, brooms, grooming utensils and horse blankets
- Bedding should be burnt

Control

Vaccination is available and can be given alone or with the tetanus vaccine as a bivalent or 2-in-1 vaccine.

The vaccination course is for horses aged 3 months or over. Give 3 doses at intervals of 2 weeks or more and an annual booster. 6 monthly boosters will provide increased protection in high risk situations

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