

Strategy To Eradicate and Prevent Strangles (STEPS)



Voluntary code in the event of a strangles outbreak

Strangles is one of the most commonly diagnosed contagious equine diseases worldwide. Some horses can outwardly show no symptoms yet still carry the disease and spread it to other horses. Currently these carrier horses can be very difficult to identify.

Unfortunately amongst some horse owners there is still a stigma about admitting their horse has strangles, which frequently hinders both quick diagnosis and effective control of the spread of the disease.

New research is currently underway with the aim of improving the diagnosis and treatment of strangles, but in the meantime our best weapon is isolation and strict hygiene procedures to prevent the spread of the disease. Early diagnosis and good biosecurity measures are the most effective way to control the spread of the disease. Although these measures can be time consuming and inconvenient; especially in the middle of the competition season, they are essential if we are to reduce the incidence of strangles.

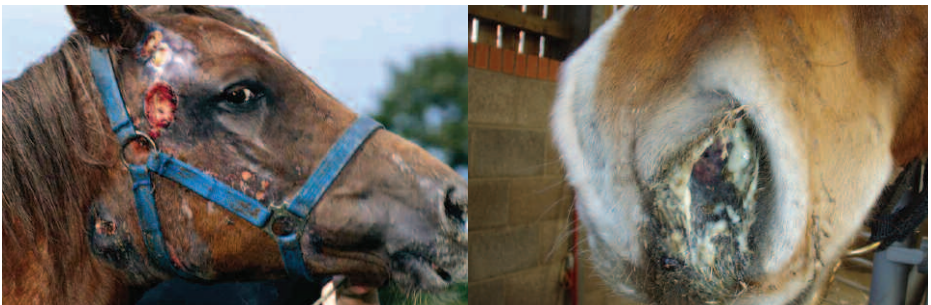
The aims of this Code are to:

- promote an increased awareness of strangles and to emphasise the importance of early diagnosis and control;
- promote increased openness and communication within the equine community about strangles and any suspected outbreaks; and
- provide a simple set of steps to be taken where strangles is suspected or confirmed.

Strangles is caused by infection with the bacterium *Streptococcus equi*.

Signs include:

- fever
- loss of appetite
- depression
- marked "snotty" nasal discharge (this is the most common symptom)
- lymph node swelling and abscesses predominantly of the head and neck.



Strangles can be transmitted both directly (direct contact with an infected horse) and indirectly (through shared housing, water and feed buckets, shared tack and equipment; and contact with shared personnel e.g. groom, instructor, veterinary surgeon or more unexpected sources such as a pet dog).

There are some simple steps that we can take at all times to help reduce the risk:

1. When you are away from home, take your own buckets, water and feed and do not allow other horses to share the buckets. Keep your horses away from nose to nose contact with other horses. If you handle another horse then wash your hands before handling your horse again. Disinfect your boots and outer clothing after each show.
2. At home get into the good practice of having separate grooming kits, numnahs, rugs, tack and buckets etc for each horse.
 - Anyone who moves between yards should implement simple hygiene measures such as washing their hands, disinfecting their boots and, if possible, changing outer clothing between yards.
 - Ideally all new horses should undergo a 2 week period of isolation after entry into the premises.
 - Keep a record of all the horses that enter and leave your premises.

Even if you take all the necessary precautions, there is still a chance a horse may become infected with strangles, especially as some horses can be carriers of strangles and go on to infect other horses without showing obvious clinical signs themselves.

Knowing what to do if you suspect strangles is essential so that appropriate action can be taken without delay.

This code encourages all yards to think about what they would do if they suspect a horse has strangles and to have an agreed procedure ready to be implemented. This Code can form the basis of that procedure.



If you suspect strangles, take the following steps immediately:

- Isolate the horse and any other horses who have had nose-to-nose contact with the suspect horse away from other horses in the yard. If possible, create three groups: infected horses; horses who have had close contact with the infected horses; and “clean” horses. Do not allow other animals to enter the stable where the horse was kept or have access to its feed or water container
- Call your veterinary surgeon. You should agree detailed isolation and handling procedures with your veterinary surgeon and implement these measures as speedily and effectively as possible.
- No horses should be allowed in, or out, of the yard at this time. All horses in the yard should remain under the care of the attending veterinary surgeon, and have the highest possible standards of hygiene.
- Contact owners of the affected horse and owners of all other horses in the yard and explain the position to them. They will much rather hear it from you now than learn later when their animal may have also contracted the disease.
- Keep a very close eye on all other horses in the yard. Young, old and immunocompromised horses (i.e. those with a history of other disease problems) are most susceptible to infection and should be monitored closely. The temperature of all horses should be taken twice daily and any horse showing an increase in temperature should be isolated and seen by your veterinary surgeon.
- Where possible, in multi-owner yards, one veterinary practice or the owner/manager of the yard should take the lead and co-ordinate all the veterinary procedures in the yard even though they may not be responsible for carrying them all out.
- Establish and agree communication procedures among all veterinarians, owners and riders of every horse in the yard and keep lines of communication open throughout the outbreak.
- Notify any neighbouring premises with horses that you have a suspected case of strangles and suggest they monitor their horses and seek veterinary advice.
- No horse in the yard should be released from isolation (or removed from veterinary supervision) until 3 consecutive nasopharyngeal swabs have been taken over a 2-week period. Alternatively endoscopically guided guttural pouch lavage may be a preferred method of diagnosis. Ideally samples should be tested for the bacterium by both culture and PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) to maximise test sensitivity. The yard should not open to normal activities until after all horses are confirmed to be uninfected.

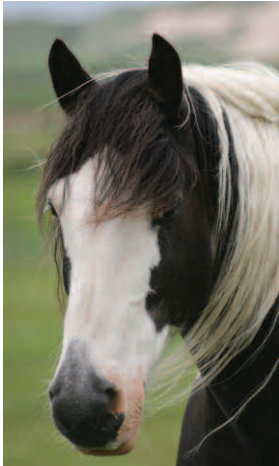


Guidance on isolation

Since strict hygiene procedures are essential to minimise the spread of the disease it is good practice to draw up a list of the hygiene rules to be adhered to by everyone connected to the yard. Give a copy of the rules to all owners / riders of the horses in the yard and pin up a copy of the list in the yard where it can be clearly seen.

These notes provide general guidance on isolation procedures. Where any of these steps are not possible a suitable alternative should be agreed with your veterinary surgeon.

1. The principal aim of isolation is to prevent contact between the isolated horses - those suspected or confirmed of having strangles - and the other horses in the yard. Ideally the isolation facility should be in a separate building or a separate field at least 10m but preferably 25m away from any other horses (additional fencing can be used to create a 10m / 25m "sterile zone" if necessary). If this is not possible then even simple steps like boarding up any grills between stables; fitting door grills so that horses cannot touch other horses over the door and similar measures will help to contain infection, although this is less than ideal.
2. A separate water supply must be available for the isolated horses.
3. Separate equipment and utensils used for feeding, watering, grooming and cleansing must be used for horses in isolation. These must not be removed or used on other horses unless they are first thoroughly cleaned and then decontaminated with an approved disinfectant.
4. As few people as possible should come into contact with the isolated horses and appropriate measures (e.g. communication with owners, notices at the entrance to the premises) should be used to enforce this. This includes pet dogs and cats living at or visiting the yard.
5. Preferably attendants of the isolated horses should have no contact with any other horses during the isolation period. Where other contact is unavoidable, it should be kept to a minimum and only after thorough washing and disinfection of hands and a change or thorough disinfection of clothing including boots and impervious outer clothing. That, if staff cannot avoid handling both infected and uninfected animals that, in addition to the disinfection and clothing changes mentioned, they attend to uninfected animals first and only then deal with the infected animals, ideally as their last task on the yard.
6. Used bedding, uneaten food and water must be disposed of carefully. Bedding and uneaten food should be carefully disposed of and water should be discharged to the sewer or septic tank to avoid cross contamination.
7. Protective clothing (e.g. disposable boiler suits, separate boots and disposable gloves) must be available at the entrance to the isolation facility and must be disposed of properly, i.e. double-bagged and taped shut. The outside of the bag should be disinfected before disposal.
8. After use, all moveable equipment and utensils for feeding, grooming and cleansing within the isolation facility must be disinfected using a disinfectant approved by Defra for general purpose under the Diseases of Animals (Disinfectants) Order 1978. A list of these is provided on the Defra website: (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/control/disinfectants-scotland06.pdf>). After the isolation area is vacated it must be steam cleaned and washed down with an approved disinfectant.



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The British Horse Society in partnership with the Animal Health Trust has launched the "Breaking the strangles hold" campaign to raise £250,000 for further research into the diagnosis, prevention and eradication of strangles. **Please make a donation at www.strangles.org to help eradicate strangles.**

For more information please contact:

1. Your veterinary surgeon
 2. www.strangles.org
 3. www.strangles.info
 4. www.equine-strangles.co.uk
 5. www.beva.org.uk
 6. www.bhsscotland.org
 7. www.ILPH.org
 8. www.scottishspca.org
6. BHS Welfare Department 01926 707807
(For advisory literature and HBLB codes of practice)

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