



RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Strangles in horses - Notice to racing trainers, owners and veterinarians

Strangles is an upper respiratory tract bacterial infection of horses caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus Equi*.

Clinical signs of the disease may include an elevated temperature, mucopurulent (thick creamy) nasal discharge and enlargement of the lymph nodes beneath the jaw/throat area. Affected horses may be inappetent and dull. Occasionally infected lymph nodes will burst open and drain pus to the outside of the jaw/throat area.

The disease is rarely fatal and predominately affects young animals that haven't yet developed any immunity to the disease or haven't been vaccinated.

The disease is considered contagious but generally requires fairly close contact between horses for transmission to occur. The bacteria can also be transmitted via nasal/abscess secretions on handler's hands, clothes and tack such as bridles.

Strangles is endemic within WA and vets will occasionally diagnose and confirm sporadic cases of infection particularly after wet and warm weather, conditions which seem to favour the proliferation of the bacteria. Mostly infections can be limited to the property of origin if owners follow veterinary advice and do not move infected horses off properties and don't bring new horses onto properties where horses may have strangles. It is rare to see isolated occurrences of strangles spread widely over a geographical area unless there has been close contact between infected and non-infected horses. It is very unlikely that it would be considered necessary to cancel racing events when isolated cases of strangles are diagnosed in WA, unless extenuating circumstances prevailed.

Nasal swabs taken from suspect horses should be cultured to grow and confirm the presence of *Streptococcus Equi* and to rule out other upper respiratory tract diseases like the common cold virus or other bacterial infections.

Strangles is not a notifiable disease under WA state legislation, meaning that there is no requirement for vets or owners to inform the Department of Agriculture and Food WA where cases of strangles are suspected or diagnosed. **However under the RWWA rules of racing, both Thoroughbred and Harness, the disease is considered notifiable to the WA racing regulatory authority (see AR 64K and HR 104). WA racing trainers or owners with suspected or diagnosed cases of strangles in their stables, or on their properties, are required to inform RWWA Stewards or Veterinarians so that RWWA can ensure that appropriate measures are in place to limit the spread of the disease and protect the health of the racing population.**

Consult your veterinarian for information on the best treatment and management practices for strangles. Basic good biosecurity practice is recommended to prevent horses contracting and spreading any contagious disease;

- Infected horses should be isolated on the property and kept away from direct contact with non-infected horses.
- Do not take horses that are infected with strangles, or have been directly exposed to infection, to another horse property or take them to a race meeting or racetrack for exercise.
- Wash hands with soap and disinfectant e.g. betadine or chlorhexidine, between handling individual horses whether showing signs of infection or not.
- Use separate tack e.g. head collars and bridles, for infected horses and don't share equipment between other horses on the property.

Vaccinations are available to prevent strangles – an initial course involves 3 vaccinations at least 2 weeks apart, followed up by 6-12 monthly boosters to maintain immunity. Most racing horses have probably received an initial course of vaccinations as foals but 6-12 monthly boosters are recommended to maintain immunity.

For more information please contact the RWWA Racing Industry Veterinarian Dr. Judith Medd on 9277 0759.

20th August 2010