



**Strangles infection  
Notice to Industry**

**16/09/2025**

**Participants are reminded that strangles is** a notifiable disease according to Australian Rule of Racing AR.89 (1)(u). AR89 (2) states that:

*A person who owns or is in charge of, or has in his or her possession, a horse which the person is aware, suspects, or should reasonably suspect is infected with a notifiable disease or condition, must report that fact to the PRA in the State or Territory in which the person is based immediately and by the quickest means of communication available to the person*

**The below information is supplied to participants to ensure they understand their obligations within the Rules of Racing and be vigilant to reduce the risk of strangles impacting upon the thoroughbred racing industry.**

**Under no circumstances should a horse with an elevated temperature or showing signs of illness be permitted to go on the training track or to travel to a racetrack for the purpose of trialling or competition.**

**Racing NSW Chief Veterinary Officer Dr. Carly Garling can be contacted at [cgarling@racingnsw.com.au](mailto:cgarling@racingnsw.com.au) or 0419 517 421 if there is need for clarification or for any relevant enquiries.**

**Dr C Garling  
Chief Veterinary Officer  
Racing NSW**

## **Reducing the risk of introducing strangles to a spelling farm or racing stable**

1. Most diseases are introduced to a horse property with the arrival of a new horse that is already infected, even though it might not be showing clinical signs.
2. Do not accept a horse into the stable from another stable or property without confirming the horse is clinically healthy, and has not been in contact with other horses which may have had strangles, or suspicion of strangles infection.
3. Minimise contact between your horses and those from other trainers when training and racing:
  - a. Be vigilant and monitor all horses for signs of infection so that you seek veterinary advice early to minimise spread of disease.
4. Know the strangles vaccine status of horses in your stable. It is recommended booster vaccines are given to horses 6 monthly in high risk situations.
5. Isolate new arrivals from other horses for at least two weeks and check them daily for any signs of ill health.

## **Strangles infection**

Industry participants are reminded to be vigilant about Strangles and the need for preventative measures to minimise the risk of infection of horses.

Strangles is a serious contagious disease of horses and donkeys caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus equi equi*. Infection occurs when susceptible horses have direct contact with infected horses or indirect contact with things contaminated by infected horses such as stables and bedding, feed or water utensils, tack, transport vehicles, and hands or clothing.

Generally strangles is mostly seen in young horses but it can also infect older horses.

## **Clinical Signs**

Key Clinical Signs in horses:

- Swollen lymph nodes (under the horses jaw)
- Abscessation of lymph nodes (under the horses jaw)
- Coughing
- Nasal discharge
- Depressed mentation
- Fever
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Off their feed (due to fever or pain when swallowing)

- Bastard strangles may cause leg swelling and abscessation in other parts of the body.

### How long will a horse be infected for?

- A horse may take 3-8 days to develop clinical signs
- Clinical signs may persist for days to months
- Horses may remain infectious for 4 weeks after clinical signs have stopped.
- Horses may retain infection in their guttural pouch and shed bacteria in the environment intermittently (they may become unwell again or infect other horses).

### Diagnosis

Diagnosis is based on clinical signs. **Swelling and abscessation in the throat area is a strong indication that the horse has strangles.** However less severe cases may only have a nasal discharge.

The veterinarian will collect swab samples from the nose and/or any abscesses and send them to a veterinary laboratory for bacterial culture. Samples must be collected before any antibiotic treatment is commenced. Growth of *S. equi equi* confirms the diagnosis.

### Treatment

- Veterinary treatment should be sought immediately to alleviate the symptoms.
- Anti-inflammatory medication may be used to reduce fever, pain and swelling.
- Individual cases need to be assessed to decide if antibiotics are indicated.
- **Antibiotics do not penetrate well into abscesses**, but may be given early in an infection, or if secondary infection of burst abscesses is considered a risk.
- Horses affected with strangles need good nursing care under veterinary advice.

It is an offence under the Rules of Racing to withhold veterinary care where it is deemed that it ought to be provided.

**Horses with strangles should not be transported unless it is absolutely necessary** for veterinary treatment. Transport is stressful for sick horses and risks spreading the disease.

Any horse with signs of respiratory disease, such as a 'snotty' nasal discharge, or that has recently recovered from such symptoms should not be taken to any

place where it might come into contact with other horses, such as a race meeting, placed on a walker, in a wash bay etc.

### **Preventing spread to other horses on your property**

- Affected horses should be isolated for 6 to 8 weeks following the onset of clinical signs to prevent spread to other horses.
- This disease is easily spread by careless horse handlers.
- Strict hygiene is necessary for people handling horses.
- In larger premises it may be possible to allocate separate handlers to infected and uninfected groups of horses.
- If you must handle both infected and uninfected horses, deal with the uninfected horses first.
- Scrupulous hand and boot washing and the use of disposable over-clothing are recommended.
- Any gear, such as rugs, halters, lead ropes, feed bins, and grooming brushes, should also be kept separate and used only for the sick horse.
- It should then be disinfected after the sick horse has recovered and before being used on other horses.
- Stables where sick horses have been held, and any areas that they may have contaminated with nasal discharge or pus should be disinfected as thoroughly as possible.
- The strangles bacterium is very hardy, and can remain viable in the environment for weeks or even months in moist conditions, representing an ongoing risk to other horses. In one study bacteria survived on wood for 48 days at 20 degrees centigrade.
- A number of disinfectants are effective against the strangles bacteria. It is important to follow label directions when using disinfectants.
- All disinfectants have reduced efficacy in the presence of organic matter so removing dirt, manure, other organic matter from inanimate objects before applying disinfectants will increase their effectiveness.

### **Visiting horse properties**

- People can introduce diseases if they handle an infected horse and then handle another horse soon afterwards.
- If you have been in contact with other horses you need to thoroughly wash your hands before handling your own horses. You should also consider changing your clothes.
- Check that visitors to your property (vet, farrier, dentist etc) follow the same biosecurity precautions.

## **Vaccination**

A regular vaccination program will help control outbreaks of strangles and is recommended for horses that go to studs, spelling farms or race meetings. Vaccination does not provide 100% protection, but it will reduce the incidence and severity of disease and restrict the spread to other horses. Strangles vaccine can be given alone or combined with tetanus vaccine as a bivalent (2-in-1) vaccine.

Annual boosters are necessary to maintain adequate levels of immunity. Six-monthly boosters are recommended to provide increased protection in high risk situations.

Swelling at the site of injection and some mild systemic signs (e.g. depression and inappetence) may occur following vaccination. These signs usually subside after a few days.

Infected horses should not be vaccinated. **Exposed horses should be isolated for 7-10 days and only vaccinated if they have a normal temperature, and remain healthy during that period.**

**Participants are reminded that a horse that has been vaccinated against Strangles is not permitted to start in any race for five clear days from the day of the dose of vaccine as per AR 88.** Further, trainers must ensure that a record of the Strangles vaccination is included in the trainer's record of treatment for such horse in accordance with the requirements of AR 104.

**To report suspicions of Strangles infection, contact your veterinarian. Racing NSW Stewards should also be contacted on 02 9551 7500.**  
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