

Strangles

It can be prevented

Strangles is an extremely contagious bacterial infection resulting in outbreaks of the disease in horses all over the country. It is caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus equi* and is probably the most common bacterial infection in the world. It is contracted through the nasal (nose) or oral (mouth) routes, and is spread from horse to horse as well as transmitted on objects like buckets, brushes, clothing and shared water. Strangles can be deadly, but fortunately the mortality rate is seldom more than one or two in 100 (1-2%). However, it remains a dangerous and economically important disease for a few reasons. The disease spreads like wildfire with up to 100% of horses being affected in a yard. The bacteria can survive for three to four months in the environment and 10% of horses can become carriers from a few months to three years. The disease can make horses very sick, but also affects healthy horses in a yard because, if the yard is quarantined (as it should be), they cannot go to shows or be sold.

After an incubation period of 3 to 12 days horses will develop a fever (40-41°C), with a runny nose (nasal discharge). The discharge changes from thin and clear to thick yellow pus. After a few days the lymph nodes around the head, neck and throat will become swollen and painful. (The swellings can become large enough to obstruct the airway – ‘strangles’). These swellings develop into pus-filled abscesses that burst or may need to be lanced. This pus contains lots of infective bacteria, thereby spreading the infection further. In about 10% of sick horses the bacteria can spread to other lymph nodes in the body causing a serious condition called ‘bastard strangles’. To confirm the diagnosis a vet will submit swabs of pus for bacterial culture. Infected yards should quarantine themselves for a month after their last sick horse recovers.

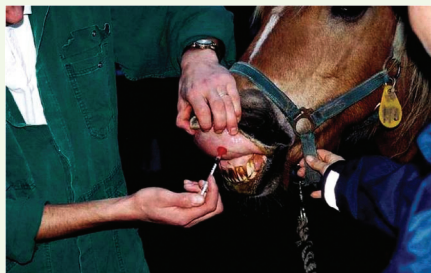
The Strangles vaccine – Equilis StrepE (Reg No. G3329 Act 36/1947; Namibia Reg. No. N-SR 1249)

Equilis StrepE is a freeze-dried vaccine containing a genetically modified strain of *Streptococcus equi*. It is indicated for the immunisation of horses against *Streptococcus equi* (strangles) to reduce the clinical signs of the disease and the occurrence of lymph node abscesses. The vaccine strain is a deletion mutant with a limited ability to replicate in horses and cannot survive in the environment. It also can't spread



from one horse to another. It is able to multiply locally in the lip, where it is injected, for a short period, but it cannot survive in the passages of the respiratory system. The vaccine will protect a minimum of 75% of horses, but in a field situation, this percentage can be much higher.

Vaccination schedule: Basic vaccination – Horses four months and older: one dose followed by a second dose four weeks later. Immunity will be complete two weeks after this basic vaccination course. This is why it is not advisable to wait until an outbreak to begin vaccinating. **Revaccination** – horses can be vaccinated every three to six months depending on their risk. Medium-risk horses are horses in yards where new horses only come in a few times a year and good management is in place. High-risk horses are horses in ‘dealing’ yards where there are new horses coming in all the time, possibly from unknown sources, as well as horses in areas where strangles is known to be prevalent. The vaccine is injected, by a vet, into the inside of the top lip. As the needle is thin (only 2 mm) and goes into the lip, horses show very little reaction when being injected.



Undesirable effects: Within four hours of vaccination horses may develop a swollen lip. This swelling causes no apparent discomfort and does not affect appetite. This reaction improves with each subsequent vaccination. An increase in temperature of 1-2°C may occur on the day of vaccination. In a few horses, swollen lymph nodes may occur. These adverse reactions are minimal when compared to a horse unfortunate

enough to get strangles.

Vaccination is just a part of preventing the disease. It does not replace good stable management and quarantine measures. *StrepE* is only available through veterinarians.

For more information please contact Intervet on 0861 838 838.