



RACING AND WAGERING WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## Strangles in horses - Notice to race horse trainers and owners

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 or throat area. Affected horses may be inappetent and dull. Occasionally infected lymph nodes will abscess and discharge fluid to the outside of the jaw or throat area.

The disease is rarely fatal and predominately affects young animals, and occasionally older horses.

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 Western Australia and sporadic cases of infection, particularly during the spring and summer months, do regularly occur. Minimising the spread of strangles infections is assisted when owners follow veterinary advice and isolate any infected horses until they are cleared of the infection. Movement of horses on and off properties where strangles infections have been confirmed should be limited to avoid the spread of the disease.

Diagnostic testing is available through veterinarians in order to definitively diagnose suspected strangles infections and trainers and owners should contact their Veterinarian to access diagnostic testing.

Strangles is not a notifiable disease under Western Australian state legislation. There is no requirement for vets or owners to inform the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) where cases of strangles are suspected or diagnosed. **However under the RWWA rules of racing, both Thoroughbred and Harness, the disease is prescribed as notifiable to the WA racing regulatory authority. 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. Good biosecurity practices are 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 RWWA Veterinarians  
Dr Judith Medd on 9445 5459 or Dr Caroline McMullen 9445 5305

30<sup>th</sup> January 2020.