



What Is Strangles?

Strangles is an infectious disease caused by *Streptococcus equi* subspecies *equi*, a bacterium that targets the horse's upper respiratory system. This bacterium is transmitted through direct contact with infected horses or contaminated objects such as tack, feed, water troughs, or the hands and clothing of people who have handled infected animals. Strangles is highly contagious, which makes it a concern in stables and boarding facilities with multiple horses.



Clinical Signs

The clinical signs of strangles generally appear 3 to 14 days after exposure to the bacteria. The most common signs include:

- Fever.
- Swollen and/or abscessed lymph nodes under the horse's jaw.
- Thick white or yellow nasal discharge.
- Coughing or wheezing.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Lethargy and decreased appetite.

These signs typically last two to three weeks. Most horses continue shedding the bacteria four to six weeks after clinical signs resolve, with the potential to cause outbreaks long-term. Chronic shedders are horses that develop a persistent infection in the guttural pouches.



Diagnosis

Diagnosing strangles requires a combination of clinical examination and laboratory tests. Veterinarians most commonly perform polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing on a nasal swab, wash, or abscess sample. It can take one to three days to receive test results, depending on the laboratory.



Treatment and Management

After a strangles diagnosis, isolate infected horses from healthy ones to prevent disease spread, and halt horse movement on and off the property. Practice strict biosecurity measures, such as disinfecting equipment and taking horses' temperatures twice daily.

Treatment for strangles typically focuses on supporting the horse through the infection and managing any complications. Most horses recover within 2-4 weeks with appropriate care. Severe cases or complications (e.g., difficulty breathing) might require more intensive treatment, such as antibiotics.



When to Call Your Vet

Keep your veterinarian informed of any changes in your horse's health status or other horses on the property showing signs of strangles. Additionally, you should call your vet if:

- The horse is having difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- Abscesses are not draining on their own.
- Signs of secondary infection or complications.