



REDWINGS
HORSE SANCTUARY

Field Notes

Advice and Information



January 2023

Infectious diseases

Help keep your horse healthy

Diseases that spread easily from horse to horse can be devastating. They cause real suffering to individual animals and a disease outbreak can paralyse equine businesses and communities, with serious financial and emotional costs. But the good news is that there are simple, practical steps every owner can take to help protect their horse and yard from infectious disease.

This edition of *Field Notes* contains introductory information on common contagious diseases in the UK, advice on reducing the risk to your own horse, answers to frequently asked questions, and top tips to help you and your horse enjoy an active, sociable life with confidence.



Quarantine can be set up in a stable or a paddock

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Informed about infectious...

Common equine infectious diseases in the UK

Redwings says...

For more guidance on any infectious disease always speak to your vet for the latest information!

Disease	Cause	Incubation	Possible signs	Did you know?
Equine flu	Virus	3-5 days	Fever, cough, nasal discharge, laboured breathing, lethargy, depression, reluctance to eat/drink, can lead to secondary infection, complications and may be fatal in severe cases	Cases are monitored by Equine Infectious Disease Surveillance (EIDS) to ensure vaccines mimic mutations in the virus; this has been essential to maintain effectiveness
Strangles (streptococcus equi)	Bacteria	2-21 days	Respiratory tract infection; can cause fever, nasal discharge, laboured breathing, swollen glands, abscesses around head/neck, lethargy, loss of appetite, may be fatal; complications such as bastard strangles are usually fatal	Around 10% of strangles cases become 'carriers', retaining bacteria in their guttural pouches which can infect other horses; only screening can guarantee a horse is not a carrier
Strep. zoo. (streptococcus zooepidemicus*)	Bacteria	7-21 days or triggered internally	Related but separate to strangles; respiratory tract infection; can cause fever, nasal discharge, laboured breathing, lethargy, loss of appetite; may lead to pneumonia or sepsis (potentially fatal); may cause abortion and can also be found in infected wounds	Strep. zoo. can be present in a healthy horse's tonsils but particular strains can trigger disease, especially following severe stress or exposure to a virus such as herpes or flu
Equine herpes (EHV)	Virus	2-14 days or triggered internally	Fever, nasal discharge, can affect the nervous system depending on the virus strain and severity of the case, also associated with abortion in pregnant mares	Most horses who contract EHV carry the virus long-term, mostly dormant but with symptoms (and contagion) recurring periodically; there are five strains in the UK, two being more common
Ringworm*	Fungus	4-30 days	Patches of raised hair followed by hair loss and flaky skin; can be itchy and, if severe, may cause anxiety/depression; highly contagious and lengthy quarantine needed as symptoms are slow to develop after exposure and can last for many weeks	Horses (and humans) who have had ringworm have a degree of immunity that reduces (but does not eliminate) their chances of getting the condition in the future
Salmonellosis*	Bacteria	6-72 hours or triggered internally	Fever, diarrhoea, rapid weight loss, quickly fatal in severe untreated cases due to fluid loss, usually more serious in young horses who may develop sepsis; salmonellosis can also cause abortion	Salmonella may be present in a healthy horse's digestive system - stress or poor health can cause bacteria to be shed in dung and be a source of infection to others though the host horse may not be ill

*Zoonotic = can be passed to other animal species and humans

Fever is usually one of the earliest signs of infection. Use our free online Temp Checker to get to know your horse's normal then monitor regularly, especially after moving yards or attending events.



Protection by injection? - common questions about vaccination

How does vaccination work?

Vaccinations prime a horse's immune system to fight off a particular disease. A horse is less likely to become ill after exposure to a virus or bacteria they are vaccinated against, or they may have fewer symptoms and/or recover more quickly.

Vaccines are very effective, but aren't a guarantee against infection, so use vaccination alongside other biosecurity practices.

What vaccinations are available for my horse?

Vaccination against equine influenza (flu) can be combined with vaccination against tetanus as one jab. Horses can also be vaccinated against strangles, herpes and West Nile Virus (an exotic disease that is becoming more of a potential threat to UK horses).

Did you know a new strangles vaccine became available in the UK in 2022? Speak to your vet for more information.

My horse lives at home and I don't attend shows, should I still consider vaccination?

The flu virus can travel up to 2km on the air and infectious diseases can also be transmitted indirectly on objects and people's clothes, feet and hands. Tetanus is not infectious but is present in the soil throughout the UK so is an essential vaccine.

Even horses that do not travel routinely may have to travel for veterinary treatment or in unforeseen circumstances, so vaccination is always an important consideration.

Is it worth my horse being vaccinated for flu when other horses at my yard are not?

Yes. Yards where horses live together are particularly vulnerable to disease outbreaks and many yards require some vaccinations as standard. Why not speak to your yard manager about introducing a vaccination and biosecurity policy if there isn't already one in place?

Your turn! Infectious disease action plan!

Follow our six-step checklist to help protect your own horse – and others – from infectious disease.

1 Know what's normal

Fever is usually the earliest sign of infection. Take your horse's temperature regularly so you are tuned in to what is normal and what is not. Changes in **pulse**, **respiration** and **behaviour** can also help you spot disease early.

Top tip If your horse has a fever, use quarantine as an immediate precaution, don't wait for more symptoms.

My horse's normal:

Temp: _____

Pulse: _____

Breathing: _____

2 Vaccinate against flu

Flu is unpleasant, and very contagious. Vaccination is key protection and just involves an annual booster after the primary course. A combined vaccine against flu and tetanus can be used every second year.

Top tip Make the most of your annual vaccination by asking your vet to check your horse's teeth, weight and general health at the same time.

Flu booster due:

Date: / /

3 Reduce risk and prevent spread

Use a yard agreement to help everyone know steps they can take to keep horses disease-free and what they need to do if infection is suspected.

Top tip A draft yard agreement is available on the Strangles Hub www.redwings.org.uk/strangles under yard manager advice.



Watch our short animation for practical **outbreak advice**

4 Stay safe at events

Avoid direct contact between your horse and others and take your own food and water supplies rather than using shared facilities. Remember that disease is commonly spread by equipment and people as well as through direct contact.

Top tip Download Redwings' free 'Five Simple Steps' poster from www.redwings.org.uk/news-and-views/strangles-events-poster to help you steer clear of disease.



Download Redwings' 'Five Simple Steps' events poster

5 Think incubation

Remember that a horse can become infectious **before** they start to show visible signs of illness. Routinely quarantining a newly purchased horse, or a horse that has just arrived on a yard helps contain infection if the horse is in the early stage of developing disease.

Top tip Keep DEFRA approved disinfectant in stock so you can set up quarantine, or disinfect surfaces and equipment whenever you need to.

My disinfectant's use by date is:

Date: / /

6 Pledge to Stamp Out Strangles

Owners and yard managers can help protect their horses from the most common equine infectious disease by pledging at redwings.org.uk/strangles. Pledgers receive an information pack, practical resources and regular e-alerts with tips and updates.

Top tip Use social media to encourage others to pledge. Tackling infectious disease is a team effort!

I pledged to Stamp Out Strangles on :

Date: / /

Quarantine checklist

Use our checklist to ensure you can lay your hands on the following in a hurry – you never know when you might need them!

- Ⓢ Barriers to create a clear boundary (shavings bales, ropes or poles can all work)
- Ⓢ Signs to say it is a quarantine area
- Ⓢ Disinfectant that is effective against the disease you are containing
- Ⓢ Veterinary-grade hand sanitiser
- Ⓢ Containers for foot dips, soaking overalls, spraying equipment etc
- Ⓢ Full-length overalls that can be worn, disinfected, dried and reused
- Ⓢ Disposable gloves
- Ⓢ A set of tools that can be kept and used in quarantine
- Ⓢ Large waterproof bags for storing muck and rubbish



Be open about outbreaks

Be open and honest about infectious disease outbreaks to help everyone take action to stop disease spreading. Communicating responsibly shows that you are managing an outbreak responsibly and receives widespread support from other horse owners.

Meet Paddy!

Breed: Cob Cross
Height: 15.1hh
Born: 2010

When Redwings resident Paddy developed a nasty nasal discharge in early 2019, our team knew they needed to do more than cross their fingers in the hope it wasn't infectious.

In addition to contacting the yard manager and the vet, Paddy's field and the horses in adjacent fields were put into immediate quarantine as a precaution. Although Paddy did not have a raised temperature, our vet took samples to be sent for testing as part of the initial examination, and ensured no horses would be moved on or off-site until test results were back.

Redwings screens all new horses for strangles by using strict quarantine and testing procedures, and our residents are routinely vaccinated against equine flu. But we know that this is not a cast iron guarantee, and if we see something that could be a sign of infectious disease, we act as though it is infectious until we know otherwise.

Thankfully, two days later, the tests for strangles and equine flu both came back as negative and quarantine was lifted. Our vet continued to test Paddy's discharge, finding that he had picked up a common environmental bug that responded quickly to treatment.

In March 2015 the team at one of Redwings' sites took the same precautions when they found a horse with thick nasal discharge. Two days later we discovered it was strangles. Using quarantine straightaway meant we had already contained the disease before we even knew what it was. If we hadn't taken precautions, the outbreak would have infected more horses and taken more time, work and money to resolve.

PS. The disinfectant to set up a precautionary quarantine area cost £2.07. The value of containing a possible disease outbreak before it spreads is priceless.



For other horse care blogs, films and free downloads, explore www.redwings.org.uk

Sign up for e-alerts to newly published horse care advice and information at www.redwings.org.uk/strangles/help-and-advice



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