



REDWINGS  
HORSE SANCTUARY

# Field Notes

Advice and Information



March 2019

## 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

### Contents:

#### Informed about infectious:

Get to know some common infectious diseases

#### Protection by injection:

We answer some common questions about vaccination

#### Six-step action plan:

Putting disease prevention into practice!

#### Case Study:

Why it pays to take precautions

# Informed about infectious...

## Common equine infectious diseases in the UK

Redwings says...

For more information 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 the Animal Health Trust 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. Get into the habit of checking your horse's temperature regularly to help you know what is normal, and spot disease before it has the chance to spread.**

## Protection by injection? - common questions about vaccination

### What diseases can I vaccinate my horse against?

Vaccinations against equine flu and tetanus protect against two nasty conditions. A vaccine is also available for herpes (EHV), though protection is less effective and booster jabs are required every six months. It is most commonly used to protect horses used for breeding. There are constant efforts to improve current vaccines and develop new ones.

### What about strangles?

Strangles vaccines are an active area of research. The challenge with current vaccines is that immunity isn't consistent and frequent boosters are needed, but vaccination is still a valuable asset against strangles. Anyone thinking of inoculating their horse should discuss the pros and cons with their vet.

### My horse is at home and I don't go to shows, is equine flu still a risk?

The flu virus can travel for up to 2km on the air, and it can be transmitted indirectly by objects, other animals and people too. Your horse may also need to travel from home for veterinary treatment.

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

Yes. Yards where horses come and go are particularly vulnerable to infectious disease outbreaks. Why not encourage other owners to vaccinate on the same day to reduce call-out costs, and speak to the yard manager about working towards a vaccination policy to protect all horses on the yard?

# Your turn! Infectious disease action plan!

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

1

## 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: / /

2

## Clear strangles carriers

Strangles carriers look healthy but have hidden infection that can spread disease to other horses. We can prevent carriers forming by making sure a horse who is recovering from strangles is checked by a vet and treated if necessary.

Top tip

Remember that infectious disease does not discriminate and any horse can get strangles #StampOutStranglesStigma



Download Redwings' free strangles pack from [redwings.org.uk/strangles](http://redwings.org.uk/strangles)

3

## Know your normals

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 normals:

Temp: \_\_\_\_\_

Pulse: \_\_\_\_\_

Breathing: \_\_\_\_\_

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 [redwings.org.uk/news-and-views/strangles-events-poster](http://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](http://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!

- ① Barriers to create a clear boundary (shavings bales, ropes or poles can all work)
- ① Signs to say it is a quarantine area
- ① Disinfectant that is effective against the disease you are containing
- ① Veterinary-grade hand sanitiser
- ① Containers for foot dips, soaking overalls, spraying equipment etc
- ① Full-length overalls that can be worn, disinfected, dried and reused
- ① Disposable gloves
- ① A set of tools that can be kept and used in quarantine
- ① Large waterproof bags for storing muck and rubbish



## 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.



## Be open about outbreaks

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



For other horse care blogs, films and free downloads, explore [www.redwings.org.uk](http://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](http://www.redwings.org.uk/strangles/help-and-advice)



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