



# NEWSLETTER

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# CONTENTS



pg.1

## A HEALTHY START TO SPRING

Staying Ahead of Contagious Equine Disease

pg.2&3

## COUGHS, FEVERS AND CANCELLED PLANS

Understanding Equine Flu

pg.4&5

## EQUINE HERPES VIRUS

Recognise, Prevent, Protect

pg.6&7

## DON'T LET STRANGLES STRIKE

How to Protect Your Horse from This Contagious Disease



pg.8&9


## STOP DISEASE IN ITS TRACKS

Practical biosecurity measures to protect your horse from contagious diseases



# A Healthy Start to Spring

## Staying Ahead of Contagious Equine Disease



**Welcome to our spring equine newsletter. As the days get longer and horses begin to enjoy more time outdoors, spring is often a welcome change for both horses and owners, but it's also a key time to stay alert to potential health risks.**

In this edition, we're focusing on common contagious equine diseases, including equine herpes virus (EHV), equine influenza and strangles. Sadly, we continue to see cases across the UK, making vigilance especially important at this time of year.

These diseases don't just affect competition or travelling horses. Even retired horses, or those who live out and rarely leave their field, can still be at risk through indirect contact, shared boundaries, people movement, or nearby new arrivals. That's why good biosecurity and early awareness are essential for every yard, no matter how quiet it may seem.

Throughout this newsletter, we'll share practical guidance on recognising early signs of disease, reducing risk and protecting both individual horses and the wider equine community. A few simple precautions can go a long way in keeping horses healthy this spring and beyond.

As always, if you have any concerns or would like advice tailored to your yard, please don't hesitate to contact the practice.



# Coughs, Fevers and Cancelled Plans

## Understanding Equine Flu

**Equine influenza (often shortened to equine flu) remains one of the most important infectious diseases affecting horses in the UK. While vaccination has dramatically reduced severe outbreaks, the virus is still circulating and cases continue to be diagnosed every year.**

**Understanding how equine flu spreads, what signs to look out for and how best to protect your horse is key to keeping both individual horses and the wider equine community safe.**

### **What is equine influenza?**

Equine influenza is a highly contagious viral respiratory disease that affects horses, ponies and donkeys. It is caused by specific strains of the influenza A virus, adapted to equines and is not transmissible to humans.

### **The virus spreads very easily through:**

- Direct horse to horse contact
- Coughing and nasal discharge
- Contaminated equipment, clothing and hands
- Shared airspace, including stables, lorries and indoor arenas

### **What are the signs of equine flu?**

Clinical signs usually develop 1–3 days after exposure and can vary in severity depending on the horse's age, immune status and vaccination history.

### **Common signs include:**

- Sudden onset of fever (often over 38.5°C)
- Dry, harsh cough
- Lethargy and depression
- Reduced appetite
- Nasal discharge (clear to thick and yellow)
- Muscle stiffness or soreness

Even mildly affected horses may continue to shed the virus and infect others, which is why early recognition and isolation are so important.

### **Why is equine flu still a problem in the UK?**

Despite widespread vaccination, equine influenza continues to pose a risk because:

- The virus evolves over time
- Not all horses are vaccinated
- Immunity can wane if boosters are delayed
- Horses frequently travel and mix at competitions and livery yards

Recent UK outbreaks have shown that unvaccinated and partially vaccinated horses are most at risk, but vaccinated horses can still develop mild signs and spread the virus if exposed.

*Vaccination remains the single most effective way to protect your horse against equine influenza.*

**Most competition bodies require vaccinating, but vaccinating is just as important for:**

- Leisure horses
- Youngstock
- Breeding horses
- Horses that rarely leave the yard

**Vaccinated horses that do become infected typically experience:**

- Milder clinical signs
- Shorter recovery times
- Reduced viral shedding

**It's essential that horses receive:**

- A correct primary course
- Boosters at the recommended intervals

If you're unsure whether your horse's vaccination is up to date, your vet can check records and advise on the most appropriate schedule.

**What should you do if you suspect equine flu?**

If your horse shows signs of respiratory disease:

1. Stop all movement on and off the yard immediately
2. Isolate the affected horse
3. Contact your vet for advice

Do not continue training or competing a coughing or feverish horse. Exercise during or soon after infection significantly increases the risk of secondary complications and prolonged recovery.

**Recovery and aftercare**

Although most horses recover fully, equine influenza can damage the respiratory tract, leaving horses vulnerable to secondary infections.

**Your vet can provide tailored advice based on your horse's age, workload and severity of illness.**

**How can you reduce the risk on your yard?**

Good biosecurity plays a vital role in prevention:

- Isolate new arrivals for at least 14 days
- Avoid sharing water buckets, tack and grooming kit
- Wash hands and change clothing between horses if illness is present
- Monitor temperatures daily during outbreaks
- Keep vaccinations up to date across the yard



*Equine influenza is serious but manageable. Good vaccination, early veterinary advice and strong biosecurity greatly reduce risk.*

*If you're concerned, speak to your vet early. Action protects your horse and the wider equine community.*

# Equine Herpes Virus

## Recognise, Prevent, Protect

Equine Herpes Virus (EHV) is something most horse owners will hear about at some point, particularly when outbreaks are reported in the UK. While the term can sound worrying, understanding how EHV spreads, the signs to look out for and how to reduce risk can make a huge difference in protecting your horse and the wider equine community.

### What is Equine Herpes Virus?

EHV is a common virus that affects horses worldwide. There are several strains, but the two most significant for horse owners are:

- **EHV-1** - associated with respiratory disease, abortion in pregnant mares and, in rare cases, neurological disease (Equine Herpesvirus Myeloencephalopathy or EHM).
- **EHV-4** - most commonly causes respiratory illness, particularly in young horses.

Many horses in the UK are exposed to EHV at some point in their lives, often as youngsters and may carry the virus without showing signs.

### How does EHV spread?

EHV spreads easily through:

- Direct horse to horse contact
- Nasal secretions (coughing, snorting)
- Shared equipment such as buckets, tack, grooming kits
- Clothing, hands and footwear of people moving between horses

The virus can survive for short periods in the environment, making good hygiene essential during times of increased risk.

### Clinical signs to watch for

The signs of EHV can vary depending on the strain and the individual horse. Common signs include:

- Fever (often the first sign)
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing
- Lethargy and reduced appetite
- Swollen lymph nodes

In pregnant mares, EHV-1 can cause abortion, sometimes with little warning.

**Neurological signs (rare but serious) may include:**

- Incoordination or weakness
- Difficulty standing
- Urinary incontinence

Any horse showing neurological signs should be treated as an emergency.

**What should I do if I'm concerned?**

If your horse develops a fever or respiratory signs:

- Isolate the horse immediately
- Stop movement on and off the yard
- Contact your vet as soon as possible

**Other practical prevention measures include:**

- Monitoring temperatures regularly during outbreaks
- Avoiding shared water sources at events
- Cleaning and disinfecting equipment
- Changing clothing and washing hands between horses
- Implementing isolation protocols for new arrivals

**EHV in the UK: staying informed, not alarmed**

EHV cases do occur in the UK, but with sensible biosecurity, prompt veterinary advice, and good communication, outbreaks can often be contained effectively. Being informed and prepared is far more helpful than being fearful.

**EHV Vaccination**

Vaccinations for EHV-1 and EHV-4 are available but the use of these vaccinations should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon to ensure it is correct for your setting.

The EHV vaccination should not be considered as an alternative to good biosecurity. We encourage horse owners to quarantine all horses newly arrived on their premises.

Whilst EHV vaccination reduces shedding of the virus and makes clinical signs milder, it does not necessarily abolish either. However, reducing shedding helps to minimise risk to other horses when a horse is infected with EHV.

It is important not to undertake vaccination during an active outbreak and we would always recommend vaccination is done when horses are in a stable population and not in a state of stress.

After the initial booster course, vaccinating needs to be maintained at six-monthly intervals in order to provide the best protection.

**If you have any concerns about EHV, vaccination schedules, or biosecurity on your yard, our veterinary team is always happy to advise. Early action protects not just your horse, but the wider equine community too.**



# Don't Let Strangles Strike

## How to Protect Your Horse from This Contagious Disease



**Whilst strangles is rarely fatal with prompt treatment, it is highly contagious and can cause significant disruption to your horse's health and routine. Understanding how it spreads, how to recognise it and what you can do to protect your horse is essential for every horse owner.**

### What Is Strangles?

Strangles is caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus equi* subspecies *equi*. It primarily affects a horse's upper respiratory tract and lymph nodes, leading to swelling and the formation of abscesses, most commonly around the head and neck. The name "strangles" comes from the difficulty some horses have in breathing when these lymph nodes swell significantly.

### How Do Horses Catch It?

Strangles is extremely contagious and spreads through direct horse to horse contact or indirectly via shared equipment, tack, water, feed, or even human hands and clothing. The bacteria can survive in the environment for several weeks, making hygiene and biosecurity crucial.

Horses that are newly infected may not show signs immediately, but they can still spread the disease. Some horses can carry the bacteria in their guttural pouches without appearing unwell, acting as silent carriers.

### Recognising the Signs

Typical signs of strangles include:

- A very high temperature (often over 38.5°C)
- Swollen, painful lymph nodes around the jaw and throat
- Pus or discharge from the nose
- Loss of appetite and lethargy
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing in severe cases

If your horse shows any of these signs, it's important to isolate them immediately and contact your vet. Early intervention can reduce the risk of complications.

## Diagnosis

- PCR testing: Detects bacterial DNA from nasal swabs, abscess material, or guttural pouch lavage
- Culture testing: Confirms presence of *S. equi*
- Blood tests

## Treatment and Management

Treatment depends on the stage and severity of the disease. Mild cases may require rest, supportive care and monitoring, while severe cases may need antibiotics or veterinary drainage of abscesses. Fever and swelling often persist for several days, but most horses recover with proper care.

Horses that recover from strangles usually develop immunity, but it may not be lifelong, and reinfection is possible. Vaccination is available and may be recommended for horses at high risk, such as those in large yards or attending events.

## Vaccination - Strangvac

- Strangvac is a recombinant protein based vaccine designed to reduce the severity and spread of strangles
- Provides protection without the risks associated with live vaccines
- Requires an initial two dose course (four weeks apart) followed by boosters every 6 months in high risk environments
- Reduces the risk of clinical disease and bacterial shedding but does not completely prevent infection

## Preventing Strangles on Your Yard

Preventing strangles is largely about good biosecurity:

- Quarantine new arrivals for at least 2-3 weeks
- Avoid sharing tack, brushes and water/feed containers between horses
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling different horses
- Keep horses showing any signs of illness separate until cleared by a vet
- Maintain a clean environment and disinfect equipment regularly

## Why Early Action Matters

Strangles can spread rapidly, particularly in yards with multiple horses. Early detection and isolation are key to preventing an outbreak. Working closely with your vet not only protects your horse but also your wider equine community.



**While strangles is serious, with awareness, good hygiene and prompt veterinary care, the risk can be managed effectively. Staying informed, vigilant, and proactive is the best way to keep your horse healthy and your yard safe.**

**If you suspect strangles in your horse, contact your equine veterinary team immediately. Acting quickly makes all the difference.**



**Biosecurity**  
**Do not**  
**enter**

## Stop Disease in Its Tracks

*Practical biosecurity measures to protect your horse from contagious diseases*

### Why Biosecurity Matters

Equine flu, equine herpes virus (EHV), and strangles are highly contagious diseases that can spread quickly between horses, causing illness, disruption to training, breeding programmes and can even cause life threatening complications. Implementing strong biosecurity measures protects your horses, your yard and the wider equine community.

### Key Biosecurity Principles:

#### Vaccination & Health Monitoring

- Keep all horses up to date with vaccinations, especially for equine influenza and EHV where recommended
- Monitor horses daily for early signs of illness: nasal discharge, coughing, fever, swollen lymph nodes, or lethargy
- Isolate any horse showing signs of disease immediately and contact your vet

#### Isolation and Quarantine

- Quarantine new or returning horses for at least 2 weeks before mixing with the main herd
- Limit contact between horses from different yards, events, or shows
- Provide separate equipment (tack, grooming tools) for isolated horses

#### Hygiene & Cleaning

- Wash hands and change clothing/boots between handling horses
- Disinfect shared equipment and surfaces regularly
- Clean water buckets, feed troughs, and stables daily

## Movement Management

- Limit horse movements during outbreaks
- Keep visitor logs for staff, farriers and vets
- Avoid sharing equipment, rugs and water/feed containers between horses

## Controlling Airborne and Contact Spread

- Maintain good ventilation in stables
- Avoid overcrowding in stables or paddocks
- Dispose of manure and soiled bedding safely and regularly

## Action Steps During an Outbreak

1. Isolate affected horses immediately
2. Contact your vet and follow their guidance
3. Restrict yard access and horse movements
4. Intensify cleaning and disinfection
5. Monitor all horses for early signs of illness and take temperatures of all horses at least once daily

## Conclusion

By understanding the risks, recognising early signs and implementing practical biosecurity measures, we can protect not only your own horse but the wider equine community. Remember, even small steps, such as monitoring new arrivals, maintaining good hygiene and keeping vaccinations up to date, can make a significant difference.

# Biosecurity

## How to prevent the spread of equine diseases



Know your horse's normal temperature (normal temperature of a horse should be 37.5°C-38.5°C)



Muck out the isolated horse last and clean forks and wheelbarrows afterwards



All new horses arriving on your yard should be isolated for 2 weeks



All grooming, feeding and tack equipment must be separated



Don't let your horse get close to others off the yard



Specific clothing (overalls), foot dips and gloves should be used



Prevent your horse from using communal water