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May 2017 Newsletter

Strangles, Strangles, Everywhere!

Just a heads up, Hayes Equine has been seeing A LOT of Strangles this year. Strangles is the common name for the bacterial infection caused by *Streptococcus equi var. equi*. This highly infectious, contagious disease affects only horses, and is spread by coming into contact with a horse (or object) that is carrying the bacteria. Sometimes it's hard to determine where the infection came from, especially when we see Strangles in horses that have never left the property.

Horses that are affected by Strangles will show signs of a high fever, snotty nose, abscesses under the jaw, and general mopeyness/depression. Occasionally, horses will stop eating or drinking, and some will develop abscesses in other areas, especially next to the eye. Whenever abscesses form in other areas besides the jaw, it is termed "Bastard Strangles." In more severe cases of Strangles, facial nerve paralysis may occur, or the horse may be unable to swallow due to the swelling around the facial nerve.

The most common route of infection is through contact with other horses or objects that have been contaminated. Therefore, the best way to prevent Strangles is ISOLATION. When leaving the property, horses should never come into nose-to-nose contact with another horse, nor should they drink from the same water bucket as other horses. Owners should try to avoid touching other horses, or allowing equipment to be transferred between horses. At home, new horses should be isolated from the herd for at least two weeks. This means that at least SIX FEET needs to separate the new horse from the herd, so no contact between horses can occur. A single, shared fence line between the herd and the new horse is not adequate isolation. Since the bacteria can be carried by ANYTHING (including flies), new or sick horses should always be handled LAST. And be sure to tell children not to pet the new horse and then go pet the rest of the herd. No equipment should be used on the sick horse that is also used on the herd.

Treatment for Strangles is the hardest for owners because the best treatment is to control the fever and wait for the immune system to fight off the infection. Abscesses that form may need to be lanced to promote healing and give some relief to the horse. Giving antibiotics to Strangles cases can actually prolong the course of the disease, and can keep the horse from developing a natural immunity. It can also cause the infection to go "Bastard," or form abscesses in other areas. Horses that have been infected with Strangles should avoid contact with healthy horses for AT LEAST 30 days after everything has healed. If there was a horse on the property that was infected with Strangles, it is considered a good practice to keep ALL horses at home for the 30 extra days to avoid carrying the disease to other farms.

A very easy, non-specific test for Strangles is a simple CBC, which can be run in-house at the clinic. Strangles produces a very specific response on a CBC that is easily recognizable when a horse is actively infected. Horses that are not actively infected (no snotty nose or fever), but whom the owners think may be carrying Strangles can be tested by nasal or guttural pouch washes that are sent off to the lab for a PCR analysis, looking for the specific bacteria.

Commercially available vaccines are available for Strangles, however, this won't necessarily PREVENT the disease, it may just lessen the symptoms. There is also a big risk of giving the vaccine to a horse with unknown history, as it can cause an allergic reaction to the vaccine. It has also been documented that the vaccine can cause a recrudescence, or cause the horse to BECOME infectious. Vaccination is also not recommended in the face of an outbreak.

The ultimate take-home message is to isolate your horse (and yourself) from other horses. New horses on the property must be separated from other horses by AT LEAST six feet for two weeks after being brought to the farm. And if your horse develops a high fever and general depression, DO NOT GIVE ANTIBIOTICS WITHOUT CONSULTING YOUR VETERINARIAN.

Castration Signs: May 12th thru May 20th Get them done before we get into the Hot weather!!!

***Just a Note that if you call after hours or weekends and have an emergency – Please leave your phone number on the message when you have the Doctor paged even if you are a long time client. A lot of people will call and need the Dr and do not leave a call back number.**