Strangles vaccination – your questions answered

Strangles: common contagious controllable
What causes strangles?

Strangles is caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus equi*. It affects horses and donkeys and is highly contagious.

Why should I vaccinate against strangles?

Strangles is a common disease found across the UK. Infected horses usually recover but it can take months for the disease to run its course, yards may be closed down and even have ongoing problems. As well as being expensive to treat and disruptive to your riding and training, it is also unpleasant for your horse as large abscesses may develop around the head and burst, discharging large volumes of pus. Along with vaccination, good stable management and hygiene are important in managing this disease.

What is in the vaccine?

Equilis® StrepE is what is described as a live vaccine. This means that it contains *Streptococcus equi* bacteria that have been altered so that they cannot survive and cause disease.
Can vaccination give my horse strangles?

No. Although it is a live vaccine the bacteria have been weakened so they survive only long enough to stimulate the horse’s immunity.

Can a vaccinated horse pass strangles on to another horse?

The bacteria in the vaccine cannot pass from one horse to another so a vaccinated horse will not be a risk to other horses.

I am worried about my horse having a vaccination given into the lip, can it be given elsewhere?

The vaccine is only a small volume and given with a fine needle (like an insulin needle) so horses hardly notice it being given. Often vets find it is easier than giving routine ‘flu vaccinations. It cannot be given elsewhere.

When can I exercise my horse after vaccination?

The majority of horses can be ridden the next day, although it is usually best to stick to light work. If your horse looks fine to ride then it is likely they are fine to ride.
My horse is the only one on the yard that is being vaccinated. Is there any benefit in vaccinating at all?

The best way to control strangles is to vaccinate all the horses on the yard as this will reduce the level of challenge. Individual horses will still benefit from vaccination as their immunity will be higher than any unvaccinated horses. However, if the level of bacterial challenge is sufficiently high, then there would still be a chance of vaccinated horses showing some signs of strangles, although the severity of these signs will normally be less severe. Therefore it is recommended to vaccinate all horses on the yard and ensure that no horse enters the yard without a complete and up to date vaccination history.

Can my horse be vaccinated if there is an outbreak of strangles on the yard?

When faced with an outbreak, a booster dose can be given to healthy horses if the horse has received a primary course and has been given a strangles booster vaccination within the last 3 to 6 months. The vaccination must be given as soon as the outbreak is identified to rapidly restore the horse’s immunity.
Why are there different vaccination protocols and how do I know which is appropriate for my horse?

All horses require a primary course of 2 vaccinations 4 weeks apart with boosters every 3-6 months. Your veterinary surgeon will be able to advise you how often booster vaccinations should be given as the booster interval is determined on a strangles risk assessment. If a 6 month re-vaccination regime is advised, a prompt booster will be required if an outbreak occurs more than 3 months after the last vaccination.

What signs will I see after vaccination?

The majority of horses just get a swollen lip, similar in appearance to a bee sting, which usually does not affect them and reduces after a few days. A small proportion of horses can get a raised temperature and this may make them sweat, shiver, and look uncomfortable (similar to what we feel after being given some vaccines). This usually settles within 12-24 hours without treatment and is normally nothing to worry about. If you are concerned contact your veterinary surgeon.
Equilis® StrepE is a vaccine for submucosal administration containing a modified live strain of Streptococcus equi.

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MSD Animal Health, Walton Manor, Walton, Milton Keynes MK7 7AJ

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Talk to your vet for further information about managing strangles on your yard or visit: www.equine-strangles.co.uk