



Dealing with a disease outbreak

When an infectious disease such as 'Strangles' is suspected; people often hope there is a less serious cause and carry on as normal to avoid any associated panic. If you are unlucky enough to have an infectious disease, ignoring the problem in the early stages will only increase the number of horses affected and prolong the length of time the yard is affected.

IF A HORSE ON THE YARD IS DISPLAYING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SIGNS THE YARD OWNER AND VET SHOULD BE INFORMED IMMEDIATELY:

- fever (high temperature)
- cough
- nasal discharge
- lymph node abscesses
- diarrhoea
- abortion
- lack of coordination.

Following a veterinary examination you will be informed of the likelihood of an infectious cause and the necessary action to limit its spread. Diagnostic samples will be taken to investigate the cause or confirm the diagnosis. In some conditions diagnosis may be difficult and a series of tests and multiple samples may be necessary.



Isolation & barrier nursing

- At the first suspicion of infectious disease affected animal/s should be removed from their groups and placed in isolation.
- In its simplest form this can involve putting a grill up at the stable door and using cones and tape to prevent people from walking directly in front of your stable.

- Isolated horses should ideally be cared for by different people to unaffected horses. Where this is not practical; handle healthy horses first then wear protective clothing, such as gloves, overalls and different footwear or go home and shower and change afterwards before handling other horses.
- Barrier nursing is the care of a patient suffering from infectious disease in isolation using protective clothing and special measures to prevent the spread of disease to others.
- Foot dips at the edge of an isolation area can be useful but must be changed regularly.
- It is important that all equipment e.g. buckets, rugs remains in the isolation area and is not removed. Soiled bedding and uneaten food should be disposed of separately.

KEY POINTS

The most important aim of quickly controlling an infectious disease outbreak is to limit the spread of the disease from infected animals to healthy.

The following steps should be taken:

- close the yard: no horses should be allowed to leave or new horses to enter the yard and all visiting professionals and tradesmen should be alerted;
- isolate and barrier nurse infected animals;
- separate animals into risk categories and monitoring closely for signs of disease;
- vaccination where appropriate.

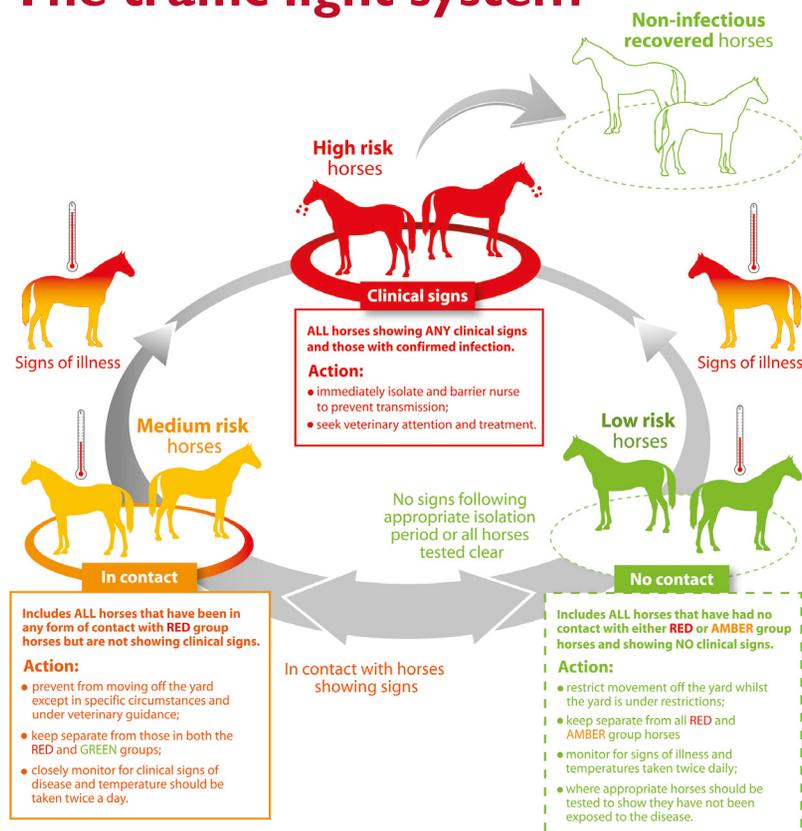
RISK CATEGORISATION

Since most illnesses have an incubation period it is not possible to tell just by looking at an animal whether it has been exposed and is incubating the disease. By dividing horse into groups according to their risk of having been exposed it is possible to limit the spread between individuals. The simplest of these systems is the 'Traffic light system': red for high risk horses, amber for medium risk and green for low risk. All equipment should be labelled in these three colours to make it clear which area it must remain in.

Setting up a quarantine/ isolation facility:

- ideally place the isolation stalls in a separate building away from ALL other animals both stabled, turned out and those walking past;
- limit movement of insects, by screening doors and windows;
- equip the quarantine facility with separate equipment and separate drain and muck heap;
- prevent horses putting heads out over doors;
- access should be restricted to only essential personnel;
- handle the quarantined horses last in the daily routine;
- keep a log of all people entering the isolation facility.

The traffic light system



VACCINATION

Vaccination in the face of an outbreak may not be appropriate.

- In an outbreak of influenza administering booster doses to horses vaccinated over six months ago and those that have lapsed helps to reduce the severity of clinical signs and time of viral shedding.
- Strangles vaccinations are of limited use in the face of an outbreak unless the horse has been vaccinated within the last six months.
- Vaccination in the face of an EHV-1 outbreak is controversial but is generally not recommended for horses that may be incubating the virus as there is a theoretical risk of exacerbating neurological signs.



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