**Strangles**

The dreaded “Strangles” is always lurking around the area, so vigilance is constantly needed. Prevention is far better than cure, and whilst an effective vaccine is still unavailable, strict biosecurity is the only weapon we have against infection.

Strangles is an extremely unpleasant respiratory infection caused by a streptococcal bacterium. It is spread by close contact between horses, or by infective material on buckets, water troughs, grazing or on woodwork. It can also be spread by human contact from horse to horse (but humans are *not* affected). It is often spread quickly within a group of horses before any clinical signs are noticed.

Initial signs include a high temperature and swellings of the lymph nodes under the jaw and at the throat. There will often be a nasal discharge, and there may be a cough. The signs can appear within a matter of hours, and the horse’s demeanour can vary from appearing normal in attitude to extremely sick and not eating. It is vital to call the vet if you are at all suspicious that strangles may be involved.

It is a good idea to regularly monitor your own horse’s normal temperature (a simple thermometer should be an important part of your basic first aid kit - available from the practice, if not!) as although there is an official “normal”, each horse is different. You should also become very familiar with the normal lumps and bumps around the jaw of your horse – again, each horse has his own special bits which may be completely normal for him.

Strangles awareness within a yard is a vital part of trying to keep it out. It is up to everybody to be vigilant, from being aware of the signs, to avoiding catching it whilst out and about. When travelling to competitions or fun rides, or even to training sessions, keep your distance from horses from other yards. Avoid nose-to-nose contact between horses (even your best mate’s!), take your own water, bucket and haynet, do not graze away from home, and try to avoid letting your horse’s nose touch anything when away from home. And definitely do not be tempted to fuss other horses yourself!

If the above biosecurity measures are adhered to, keeping strangles out of a well run yard should then be down to making sure it is not brought onto the yard by a new horse. This is quickly and easily achieved by a simple blood test. Many yards are now adopting the policy of keeping newcomers in isolation whilst a blood test is performed – this blood test will only tell if the horse has been in contact with the strangles bug relatively recently, but cannot tell if the horse has been infected in the past few days. The ideal situation then, is to keep all newcomers in isolation for 1 week and then blood testing, but each individual situation should be discussed with a vet. The cost of a blood test is far less than the cost and knock-on effects of strangles, and newcomers should be impressed by the yard’s policy rather than put off by the bill.