



# Premium Assured Strangles Scheme



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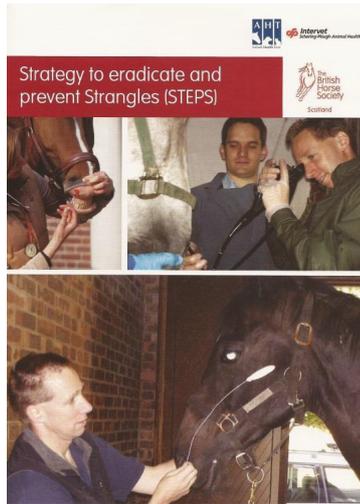
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# Introduction

Welcome to the Premium Assured Strangles Scheme guidelines, which include details of the 'Bronze', 'Silver' and 'Gold' membership status.

SRUC Veterinary Services supported by The British Horse Society, developed the Premium Assured Strangles Scheme (PASS) in 2013, as part of an organised strategy to tackle strangles in the equine population. The scheme is based on the principles of testing to identify and treat potential carriers of the disease, and robust but practical yard biosecurity to reduce the risk of disease. Member yards also have in place plans to deal with outbreaks of strangles; this action plan is based on the published guidelines 'Strategy To Eradicate and Prevent Strangles' (STEPS), copies of which can be obtained from the BHS website, [www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk) and SRUC's PASS website at [www.equinehealthscheme.com](http://www.equinehealthscheme.com)



The Strategy to eradicate and prevent Strangles (STEPS) provides the guidelines for biosecurity and disease management used in this scheme.

Please read these guidelines carefully and keep a copy available on the yard alongside a copy of STEPS. They are an important part of PASS. SRUC Veterinary Services collaborates with BHS and a range of equine organisations to ensure that strangles advice is consistent throughout the equine industry.

## Benefits of the Scheme

- Member yards are awarded certificates of health status providing enhanced health status amongst the equine community. This evidence of commitment to measures that safeguard horses from exposure to strangles is attractive to potential clients.
- Members are recognised as having a defined protocol in place for dealing with instances of suspected strangles and helps reduce the 'stigma' of strangles.
- The early detection of any carrier animals, and a management plan to eliminate infection greatly reduces strangles disease risk of horses on member yards. An added bonus is that robust biosecurity also helps prevent a whole range of other equine diseases.
- A closer relationship is fostered between the yard and their veterinary surgeons through collaborative measures to maintain good health.
- Regular PASS Newsletters and information dissemination on Social Media for members.

## What is the Premium Assured Strangles Scheme?

- A voluntary scheme for equine premises, based on blood sampling for evidence of exposure to *Streptococcus equi subspecies equi* (*S. equi*, the causative agent of strangles).
- Follow up testing of any seropositive horses to identify and treat *S. equi* carriers.
- Member yards use protocols provided by The Strategy to eradicate and prevent Strangles (STEPS) which provides the guidelines for biosecurity and disease management used in this scheme.
- The private veterinary surgeon is involved at every step of sampling, advice and treatment.

## Gold and Silver Status

- The two higher levels of scheme membership, 'Gold' and 'Silver' both begin with testing of ALL horses on the yard, to confirm through testing that all horses on the yard are free from strangles infection.
- Biosecurity based on STEPS is followed, including isolation and testing of new horses to the yard. ( See page 8.)
- In order to maintain Gold status, all horses are retested at the end of each year.
- If a yard wishes to move to the Silver status, annual retesting is not required. Instead, a signed declaration by the yard manager and their veterinary surgeon states that the scheme guidelines have been adhered to, and will continue to be followed in the coming year. Silver status is awarded yearly based on this declaration.

## Bronze Status

The more recent 'Bronze' status has been introduced at the request of livery yards that have not had strangles on the yard (minimum 2 years freedom from disease), that apply appropriate precautionary measures and would like recognition of the health status without undertaking whole-yard testing at the outset.

- Bronze status does not require initial testing of all horses already resident on the yard
- Bronze status is suitable for yards which are considered by their veterinary surgeon to be free of strangles based on history and lack of clinical cases
- A declaration to this effect is signed by the vet and yard owner to gain Bronze status
- Thereafter the same biosecurity plan is followed as in the higher tiers of membership, including testing of new admissions to the yard.

# How does the Scheme work?

## Gold and Silver Status

### 1) Initial testing

- Application to join the scheme is made by the yard owner/manager, with the agreement of their clients (the owners of the individual horses) and the veterinary surgeon(s) involved on the yard.
- At the point of application all horses on the yard are identified by their name and passport number. Submission forms will then be issued to the yard for use by the veterinary surgeon(s) when taking samples.
- All horses on a member yard are blood sampled for evidence of exposure to *S. equi*
- If all are negative, the yard is certified as 'PASS Gold.'
- Inconclusive results should be rechecked after 10-14 days, if the second result is inconclusive or negative, the result is recorded as negative.
- A seropositive result on the blood sample indicates that the horse has been exposed to strangles. The infection may have been cleared successfully, however there is a small chance that following infection a horse can carry the bacteria, and pose a risk of disease outbreak in the future (a 'carrier' animal).
- Seropositive horses are further tested by guttural pouch lavage and PCR (or three consecutive nasopharyngeal swabs) to determine if the horse is a carrier or not.
- Confirmed carrier horses are quarantined and treated as appropriate until *S. equi* free
- Following negative testing of all horses (and successful treatment of any carrier horses if necessary) the yard is certified as 'PASS Gold'.

*Note that in the first year member yards are awarded the status 'Gold', as initial testing and biosecurity guidelines are identical for both Gold and Silver status.*

### 2) Preventing the introduction of strangles

- Good biosecurity is essential to prevent strangles
- Guidelines are laid out in the Strategy to eradicate and prevent Strangles (STEPS), with further details specific to the scheme starting on page 7.

### **3) Annual recertification**

**Initial Gold Status lasts for twelve months.**

#### **Retaining Gold Status**

At the end of the twelve month period, a yard can choose to retain Gold status, by re-testing all horses as per the initial protocol.

#### **Moving to Silver Status**

Alternatively, the yard may wish to move to Silver status. This is granted at twelve month intervals, provided that precautions against the introduction of infection have been followed, as set out in these guidelines.

Certification for Silver status requires a signed declaration from the yard owner / manager, and their veterinary surgeon, stating that these guidelines have been followed, and that to the best of their knowledge strangles infection is not present on the yard.

#### **Bronze Status**

Bronze yards are certified yearly by the yard owner and veterinary surgeon signing a declaration (without initial testing of all horses on the yard).

This states that based on history and (lack of) clinical signs, to the best of their knowledge strangles infection is not present on the yard (minimum of 2 years freedom from infection).

The declaration also states that appropriate biosecurity guidelines have been followed, including isolation and testing of all new entrants to the yard, unless coming from another PASS member yard with in-date certification.

# Testing for strangles

- Routine testing to gain Gold status, or for the addition of new horses to a yard, is by a blood sample (ELISA) to check for antibodies to strangles.
- Horses moving between yards with the same level of certification do not require re-testing when entering new yards, though this is at the discretion of the receiving yard. A 3 to 4 week period of isolation and observation should be implemented in all instances, as recommended under current Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB) Strangles guidelines.
- Horses which have an antibody (immune) response have been exposed to the strangles bacteria. In all likelihood they have successfully eliminated the bacteria from their system, however there is a chance that they could be harbouring the bacteria (a 'carrier' animal)
- Horses which test positive by the blood test should receive follow up testing to ensure that they are not carrying strangles. This is usually in the form of an endoscopic examination of the guttural pouches, with testing of the content of the guttural pouch for bacteria.
- Horses which are carrying the bacteria in their guttural pouch can be treated and retested to confirm elimination of the infection

## Notes:

A single ELISA test is acceptable, provided that the horse being tested has not shown clinical signs consistent with strangles within the last 3 weeks, and has not had contact with clinically affected animals in that time.

Testing of seropositive horses by three consecutive nasopharyngeal swabs over a two week period is acceptable if endoscopy and guttural pouch lavage are not available. Nasal swabs (i.e. from the superficial nostril) are not acceptable for routine monitoring or to prove non-carrier status.

Re-testing of previously seronegative horses may be required if are exposed to carrier animals during the period between the carrier being identified and treated.

# Scheme guidelines

## Reporting of results

- All test results will be reported to the submitting veterinary surgeon.
- It is the responsibility of the horse owner to inform the yard owner / manager of any results, following consultation with their veterinary surgeon.
- On member yards it is understood that results will be shared with the yard manager to allow appropriate control measures to be put in place.
- Inconclusive serology results should be followed up by a repeat blood test 10 -14 days later. If another inconclusive result is obtained at this time the overall result is considered negative.

## The identification of carrier horses

- If carrier horses are identified during the annual screening, appropriate biosecurity should be implemented during treatment of that horse (see STEPS guidelines).
- Provided that appropriate biosecurity has been maintained, retesting of the remaining horses following clearance of infection is not required under the scheme.
- If biosecurity has not been possible or adequate, or if the attending veterinary surgeon deems it necessary, re-testing of previously seronegative horses should be undertaken once carrier horses have been successfully treated.

## Accepted tests

- In order to provide a consistent approach, scheme testing should be undertaken by SRUC Veterinary Services. Whilst no biological test is perfect, SRUC uses the very best tests available to ensure the most accurate results possible.
- PCR is the preferred test for guttural pouch lavage samples, as it is more sensitive than traditional culture. If your veterinary surgeon recommends culture in addition, we are happy to carry this out.
- When testing for the presence of *S. equi* bacteria, guttural pouch washes obtained by endoscopy are preferred over nasopharyngeal swabs. This is because only one sample is required (rather than three consecutive swabs), and the guttural pouch wash is more sensitive.
- Nasal swabs (i.e. from the superficial nostril) are **not acceptable** for routine monitoring or to prove non-carrier status.

## Certification of premises

- An initial “Gold status” certificate, valid for one year, will only be issued once all horses test negative under the rules of the scheme. This will be provided directly to the yard owner / manager.
- To maintain an Gold status, testing of all horses should be performed annually.
- For Silver status, a declaration available at [www.equinehealthscheme.com](http://www.equinehealthscheme.com), should be signed by the yard owner / manager, stating that the PASS guidelines have been followed throughout the previous year.
- For Bronze status, a declaration is available at [www.equinehealthscheme.com](http://www.equinehealthscheme.com).

## **New horses arriving on the premises**

- A period of 3-4 weeks quarantine on arrival at the new yard is recommended under current Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB) Strangles guidelines (STEPS).
- All new arrivals should be blood sampled for evidence of exposure to strangles, and therefore possible carrier status unless moving from other PASS member yards of the same status and with in-date certification. In this instance, the need for testing will be at the discretion of the receiving yard
- Ideally testing of horses with unknown status should be carried out before movement onto the yard, and again following three weeks of quarantine on the new yard.
- A single test following three weeks quarantine on the new yard is also acceptable
- At the discretion of the veterinary surgeon, the new horse may have a single test pre-movement, providing the horse has shown no signs of strangles in the last 3 weeks, and has not come into contact with clinically affected horses. A quarantine period is still recommended.
- PCR on guttural pouch lavage (or three consecutive nasopharyngeal swabs) is an alternative acceptable method of testing new arrivals.

## **Involvement of several veterinary practices on one member yard**

- Initial application to join the scheme is through the owner or manager of the yard, on behalf of the individual owners, and following consultation with all owners and veterinary surgeons involved in the yard.
- Each veterinary surgeon will take and send samples from all the horses that they are responsible for, or, with permission, the practice assigned as principle vets for the yard will arrange sample collection.
- Note the STEPS guidelines which suggest that where possible in the event of an outbreak the principal practice and the owner / manager of the yard should coordinate testing and isolation / treatment procedures, even if testing of individual horses is carried out by separate practices.
- For routine annual testing all initial blood samples must be taken and submitted to SRUC Veterinary Services within a period of 10 days.
- Individual horse results will be issued as soon as available to the submitting veterinary surgeon, to be reported to the horse owner.

## **Foals**

- Foals at foot do not require separate testing.
- Once weaned young stock should be tested at the same time as adult animals.

## Movement of horses (for example to competitions)

- Members should follow **STEPS** guidelines on reducing the risk of infection whilst away from home.
- Any horse that develops signs suspicious for strangles following travel should undergo testing and quarantine as detailed in the **STEPS** guidelines, and under the advice of your veterinary surgeon.
- Routine testing of horses that have been temporarily away from the yard (e.g. to competitions) is not required, provided that **STEPS** guidelines have been followed, there was no known exposure to strangles, and the horse does not show any clinical signs consistent with strangles.
- Prolonged absence from the yard, where biosecurity cannot reasonably be maintained or monitored, for example loan to another non-member yard, requires retesting of the horse upon re-admittance to the member yard. The form of this re-testing is at the discretion of the veterinary surgeon, following discussion with SRUC veterinary services if necessary.

## Movement of horses between certified yards

- At the discretion of yard owners, and under veterinary advice, horses may move between member yards without additional testing. However it should be noted that the PASS does not guarantee freedom from disease, and that disease may still affect member yards (see 'In the event of a strangles outbreak on a member yard' below). Therefore yard owners may request re-testing before admission of horses to a new yard.
- For yards wishing to retain the Gold status: If the timing of routine annual tests means that a horse is not tested by any means for a period of 18 months or greater, it is the responsibility of the owner and yard manager to ensure that the horse receives an appropriate test to confirm negative status.

## In the event of a strangles outbreak on a member yard

- Whilst membership of the scheme reduces the chances of clinical disease, the risk cannot be eliminated altogether. Membership aims to give yards the best possible chance of remaining free from strangles, however disease can be introduced in many different ways, and membership does not guarantee that a yard will remain free from strangles.
- Certification is not removed from a yard in the event of an outbreak, however yards which suspect strangles, or suspect that exposure may have occurred should seek appropriate veterinary advice, and manage the situation in conjunction with their veterinary surgeon(s) with reference to **STEPS**.
- An outbreak of strangles should not hamper re-certification, providing it is dealt with appropriately and with reference to **STEPS**, and all infected horses are identified and treated to eliminate infection.

## Vaccination

- The strangles health scheme offers an alternative to vaccination, and is not suitable for yards in which vaccination is practiced. The currently available vaccination gives rise to increased antibody levels, and in the context of the scheme may confuse results, possibly leading to unnecessary further testing.