

Premium Assured Strangles Scheme



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Introduction

SAC Consulting Veterinary Services (a division of SRUC), supported by The British Horse Society, has developed the Premium Assured Strangles Scheme (PASS), as part of an organised strategy to tackle Strangles in the equine population. The scheme is based on the principles of yearly 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.

What is the Premium Assured Strangles Scheme?

- A monitoring scheme for equine premises, based on yearly 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 have a clear protocol (**STEPS**) in place for dealing with outbreaks of disease
- The private veterinary surgeon is involved at every step of sampling, advice and treatment

Basic outline of testing

- All horses on a member yard are blood sampled yearly for evidence of exposure to *S. equi*
- If all are negative, the yard is certified as 'PASS accredited'
- 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 ('carrier status')*
- Seropositive horses are further tested by guttural pouch lavage and PCR (or three consecutive nasopharyngeal swabs) for evidence of carrier status
- 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 accredited'

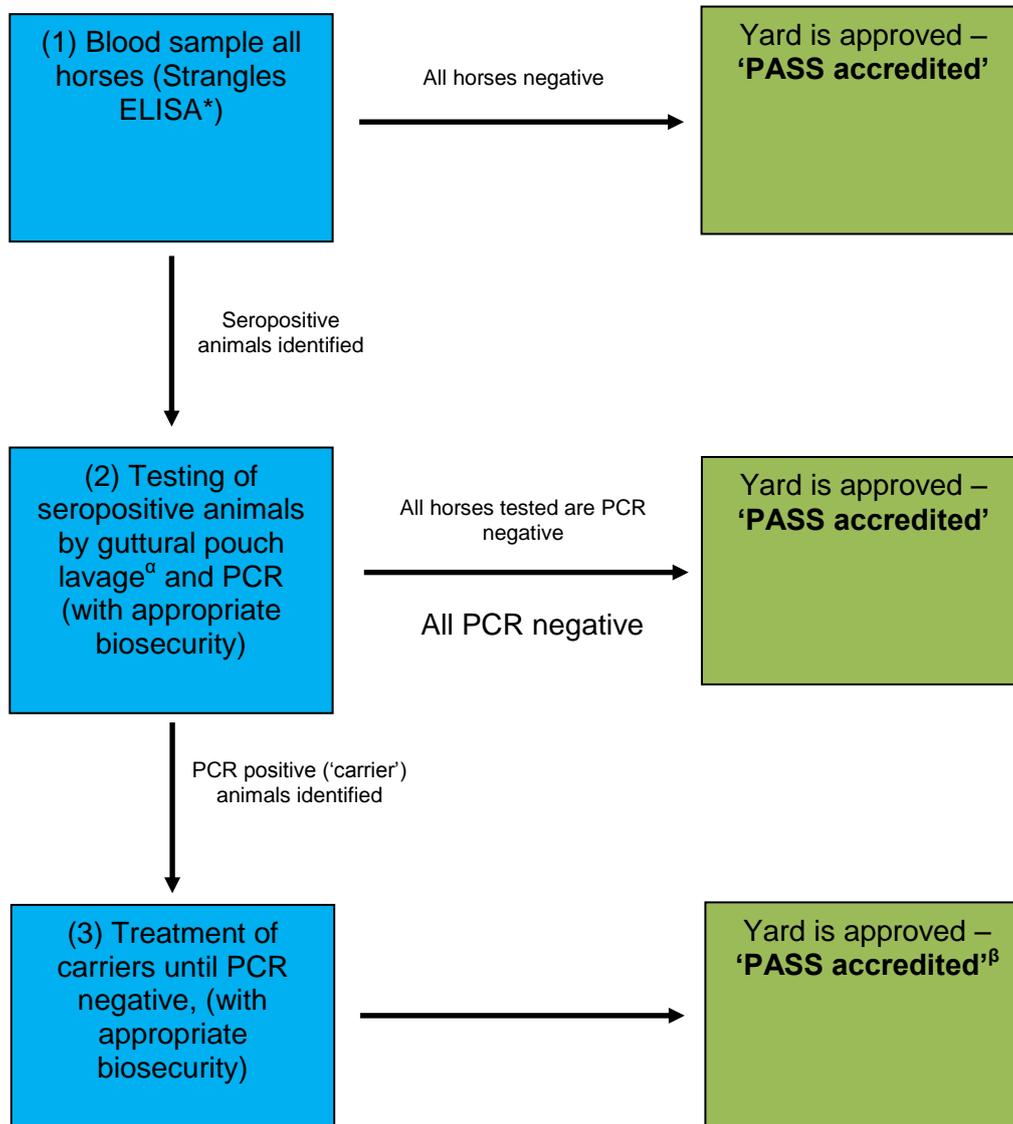
Benefits of the scheme

- Member yards enjoy an enhanced status amongst the equine community
- Members are recognised as having a defined protocol in place for dealing with outbreaks of suspected Strangles
- The risk of disease in horses on member yards is reduced due to the reduction in carrier animals
- All strangles laboratory testing for members is discounted (ELISA, PCR and culture).



Basic Testing Protocol

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.



* 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.

^α Testing 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.

^β Re-testing of previously seronegative horses may be required if they have been exposed to identified 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.
- SAC Consulting Veterinary Services cannot disclose individual results to the yard owner or manager.
- On completion of testing for all horses on the yard, and if all results are negative, a certificate will be issued to the yard owner
- Following positive results, further testing must take place as set out above. On satisfactory completion of negative testing for all horses the yard will be certified.
- 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

- All test results for use as part of the scheme should have been submitted to SAC Consulting Veterinary Services. Whilst no biological test is perfect, SAC uses the very best tests available to ensure that results can be relied upon.
- 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

- A certificate 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.
- The certificate will be valid for one year, from the date of the successful negative status, and testing must be carried out annually to maintain accreditation.

New horses arriving on the premises

- The yard owner should inform SAC Consulting Veterinary Services of any new horses coming onto the yard, or of any horses leaving the yard. A form will be provided on request for this purpose.
- A period of 3-4 weeks quarantine on arrival at the new yard is recommended under current Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB) Strangles guidelines.
- All new arrivals should be blood sampled for evidence of exposure to Strangles, and therefore possible carrier status.
- Ideally testing should be carried out before movement, 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.
- Positive results in incoming horses should be dealt with as in the above flowchart, with clinical disease approached according to **STEPS**.

The 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.
- For routine annual testing all initial blood samples must be taken and submitted to SAC Consulting 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.
- Note the **STEPS** guidelines which suggest that where possible in the event of an outbreak one veterinary practice or 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.



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.

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 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.
- 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**.

Vaccination

- The Strangles health scheme offers an alternative to vaccination, and is not suitable for yards in which vaccination is practiced.

