

AN OWNER'S GUIDE TO ENDOSCOPIC GUTTURAL POUCH LAVAGE FOR STREPTOCOCCUS EQUI. EQUI (STRANGLES)

This procedure may be required to be performed in two main situations to identify whether an animal is harbouring the *Strep. equi* (Strangles) bacteria in their guttural pouches (i.e. a “carrier”).

- after a positive or inconclusive (“grey area”) pre-movement strangles blood test.
- after an outbreak of Strangles on a yard

The guttural pouches are two air filled sacs which open into the back of the horses’ throat.



Bacteria can reside in these pouches without the horse showing any signs of being unwell. These horses are known as carriers and can act as a reservoir for infection to other animals. Fortunately, the vast majority of horses successfully clear the bacteria from their system after exposure to the bug. The scoping procedure is the most reliable technique to identify the small number of horses that have not cleared the bacteria from their system.



What to expect

Once the horse is sedated an endoscope is passed up the nostril and into the throat, the vet can then visualise the slit like openings into the guttural pouches (figure 2). A guide is first passed into the pouch, this helps to open the narrow flap to allow the endoscope to pass into the guttural pouch. Gaining entry can be a technically challenging procedure and occasionally requires a degree of patience. Once the endoscope is in the guttural pouch, the scope is moved around to examine the pouch (figure 3). The vet will be taking note of any excessive mucus or the presence of pus, or firm lumps of pus (chondroids). Sterile saline is then injected through the scope and into the guttural pouch. This saline washes the mucous and cells from the inside of the guttural pouch and is sucked back out to form the sample which will be sent to the lab. A separate wash sample must be taken from each guttural pouch.

View of inside one guttural pouch:



We will very often treat the guttural pouch with antibiotics at the time of sampling. The advantage of this would be that the cost of the medication is very low compared with the cost of an additional visit and repeating of the scope at a later date if a positive result is obtained. The main disadvantage of this is that there is a low risk of the horse developing colitis. Colitis can be caused by a small amount of antibiotics being swallowed and disrupting the bacterial flora of the gastrointestinal tract. If you would



prefer to gain the results prior to any antibiotic treatment please inform the vet prior to the scoping procedure.

Laboratory analysis

Following sample retrieval from both the left and right guttural pouches we would mix them together and submit this 'single' sample for PCR assay.

PCR (polymerase chain reaction) - looks for small fragments of the bacterial DNA and is a more sensitive test than the traditional culture. Culture involves growing the organism on specific plates with lower detection rates than PCR. If however you would prefer the sample to be also be cultured please inform the veterinary surgeon; an additional charge of £25 will be added to the standard package.

We would expect to receive the majority of our PCR results back within 3 working days. If you have not heard from us after 3 days please contact the office (culture results may take longer).

Booking a guttural pouch lavage

Because of the infectious nature of Strangles where possible this procedure will generally be booked in towards the end of the vet's day.

Our current Guttural Pouch scope package includes the cost of the sedation, the scoping procedure, postage and packaging of the samples, the laboratory fees (PCR), and the interpretation and delivery of the results. Please contact the office on 01361 889106 for an estimate of costs.

As per our practice policy lab results will not be forwarded until payment for the procedure and all outstanding bills have been paid for.

More Information

For more detailed information on the strangles disease, the blood test and biosecurity please see our factsheets on the subjects at our website.