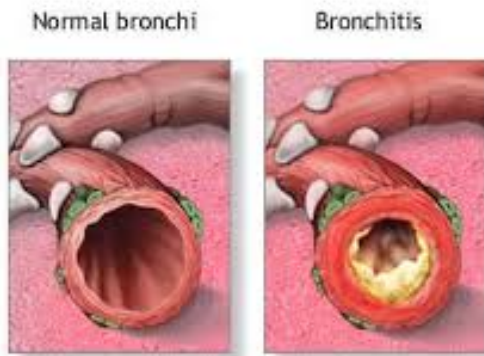


## Rattles pneumonia

Rattles is a disease characterised by extensive lung abscessation and inflammation. It is caused by *Rhodococcus equi*, a soil dwelling bacteria that thrives in the hot, dry conditions experienced in Australia over summer. *Rhodococcus equi* causes serious respiratory (and occasionally intestinal or joint) disease in foals aged between 1 and 6 months of age. Rattles is very expensive to treat, and mortality rates are very high—around 30%, causing significant financial and emotional stress to owners. Most foals in the early stages of disease show little in the way of symptoms. Usually these foals present acutely distressed, despite having had the disease for several weeks. This is because the foal compensates extremely well in the early stages of illness feeding and behaving fairly normally until his respiratory disease becomes advanced.



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Signs of disease include a fever, exercise intolerance, respiratory distress, diarrhoea, or lameness. Diagnosis is achieved through a careful clinical examination, bloods tests (elevated white blood cell and fibrinogen counts), radiography and ultrasound of the lungs to determine the presence of lung abscessation. Laboratory testing of lung samples can be performed to confirm the diagnosis. Treatment for rattles includes a very specific

combination of the antibiotic azithromycin or clarithromycin and rifampin, and supportive treatment as required, such as anti-inflammatories, oxygen therapy and anti-ulcer medication. Treatment is very costly, and some foals won't survive despite receiving the very best care and treatment. Prevention is always better than cure, and while complete prevention will be difficult in all cases, particularly on endemic farms, there are some steps that can be taken to minimise the risk of infection. Because foals contract the rattles infection by breathing in dust contaminated with *Rhodococcus*, or eating infected manure, the main way to reduce infection is through pasture management. Other ways of reducing infection include:

- Maintaining foaling paddocks with a good pasture coverage
- Rotating pastures as needed
- Avoid keeping foals in dusty yards - irrigate yards when mares and foals are bought in
- Avoiding overcrowding paddocks
- Reducing faecal contamination of soil
- Monitoring foal temperatures daily
- Ensuring adequate IgG levels at birth

If rattles is diagnosed early and treated aggressively, there is a better prognosis for a complete recovery.