Rhodococcus equi Pneumonia in Foals

Rhodococcus equi is a bacterium that inhabits the soil and causes pneumonia in 1 to 4 month old foals. An excellent description of the disease can be found here: http://www.aaep.org/health_articles_view.php?id=325.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Since starting my diagnosis and treatment protocol in 2004, I have found a significant reduction in the incidence and severity of the disease with the use of hyperimmunized plasma at birth and at 3 weeks of age. This, combined with early detection through ultrasonographic screening, has so far eliminated death loss from Rhodococcus equi in my practice and has significantly reduced the number of sick foals and treatment times.

My Protocol

• Administer FDA licensed hyperimmunized plasma within 12 hours of birth and again at 3 weeks of age.

• Ultrasound screen every two weeks starting at fourth week of age until 120 days of age.

• Start on antibiotic treatment if an abscess greater than 1cm in diameter is detected.

Treatment Notes

Experience, and that of my colleagues, suggests that treatment with plasma is only effective if the first dose is given at the time of birth. A foal that ships with its dam to the farm during foal heat, as an example, is not a candidate for plasma. Although I haven't tried it, a very experienced colleague has found no increase in incidence, severity or treatment time when only using one dose of plasma at birth and not repeating at 3 weeks of age.