



Office of the State Veterinarian Bulletin

RABIES DETECTION FOR LIVESTOCK OWNERS

Precautions

Rabies is an always fatal disease!

Rabies infections are not uncommon in other parts of the world. Most people in other parts of the world who get infected with rabies have been bitten by an infected animal. Getting the infected saliva from an infected animal into an open wound or mucous membrane of eyes, nose, or mouth can also lead to infection. Rabies is not spread by contact with feces, blood, or urine.

Therefore wearing gloves and preferably double-gloving is imperative in situations involving possible rabies exposure. Whether there is a need for other equipment is dependent on the task/s being performed. In most situations for field staff, gloves should suffice.

REMEMBER: The goal is to not allow the virus (primarily from the infected animal's saliva) to come into contact with skin, eyes, or mucous membranes. Skin which looks intact generally has multiple microscopic abrasions that the virus can use to enter the body.

Effective vaccines are available for livestock. Please discuss the matter with your private veterinarian.

General Disease Information

Behavior and Situational Awareness

Many livestock rabies exposure cases occur because of the natural curiosity of the livestock involved.

SCENARIO

- A rabid skunk becomes debilitated and disoriented then it wanders around in a lot, pasture, or section of range with livestock within sight or hearing.
- Some of the livestock will run away. However, some will actually come to investigate the occurrence. (How many times have you seen a group of heifers run over and try to sniff the barn cat when it wanders through the lot? It's a process of natural curiosity.)
- And how do they investigate? It's usually with their noses stuck down on top of that rabid skunk!
- So if the skunk bites, the odds are good it will bite the curious critter (cow, goat, let's use horse for the remainder of this scenario) somewhere on that horse's nose or muzzle.
- Then because of the location of the bite wound (close to significant nerves and nearer the brain) transmission of the virus will be effective and fairly quickly infective.



Clinical Signs

Please note not all signs will be displayed by all animals.

Cattle

- Excessive salivation (100%)
- Behavioral change (100%) (especially sudden onset)
- Muzzle Tremors (80%)
- Bellowing aka "Vocalization" (70%)
- Aggression, Hyper-aesthesia (extra sensitive) and/or Hyper-excitability (70%)
- Pharyngeal Paresis (weakness)/Paralysis (60%) [Cattle with rabies are often presented for "choke" or related problems with chewing or swallowing.]
- *Furious Form* (as opposed to *Dumb Form*) was seen in 70% of the cattle (Old terminology - *Dumb Form* name derived from animal standing there as if it does not know that is alive and in its surroundings and/or acting as if blind.)

Sheep (consider Goats to appear similarly)

- Muzzle and/or Head Tremors (80%)
- Aggressiveness, Hyper-excitability (extra sensitive), and/or Hyper-aesthesia (80%)
- Trismus (60%) [think of this as "lock jaw with spasms"]
- Salivation (60%)
- Vocalization (60%)
- Recumbency aka "*Downer*" (40%)
- *Furious Form* (as opposed to *Dumb Form*) was seen in 80% of the sheep (Old terminology - *Dumb Form* name derived from animal standing there as if it does not know that is alive and in its surroundings and/or acting as if blind.)

Horses

- Sudden Behavioral Changes
 - Initially Dull and Depressed, Loss of Appetite
 - Can be Aggressive and Violent
- ADR ("*Ain't Doin' Right*") may initially be confused with mild-to-moderate colic
- Low-grade Fever
- Lameness, Wobbly and/or In-coordination
 - often rabies in a horse starts with a progressive rear limb lameness - "*off in the rear*"
- Swallowing Problems (can sometimes look like choke) and Drooling
- Progresses to Being "*Downer*" in 5-7 Days

Swine (very rare in swine due to most being housed indoors)

- Excitement/Aggression
- In-coordination
- Excessive Salivation/Drooling
- Depression/Convulsions/Down