

Rabies Symptoms, Prevention & Management

In November 2010, a calf in Red River County (TX) tested positive for rabies. Due to the knowledge and concern of the rancher's friend, the rapid response of the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and a fair amount of luck, the animal was tested and the rancher was vaccinated.

Rabies is a zoonotic disease, an infectious agent that can be transmitted between animals and humans. Practically all mammals are vulnerable to the rabies virus. It is seen in wild animals, livestock, pets and humans. Cats, dogs and cattle account for nearly 90% of rabies cases in domestic animals. Horses, mules, sheep, goats and ferrets account for the remaining 10%. Skunks, raccoons, bats, foxes and rodents are the most common wild animals that carry the disease.

The rabies virus is present in the saliva of infected animals and humans. It is usually spread through a bite, scratch or when infected saliva comes in contact with an open wound. The virus affects the nervous system, muscles and organs. It is latent on average 30-50 days in humans and 20-60 days in animals. Death usually occurs from cardiac or respiratory arrest a few days after the onset of symptoms.

Symptoms in Animals

- Aggression
- Combative tendencies
- Restlessness
- Hypersensitivity
- Voice change
- Excessive slobbering
- Lethargy
- Weakness in one or more limbs
- Inability to raise its head or make sounds
- Hydrophobia-fear of water

Symptoms in Humans

- Malaise
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Fever
- Pain
- Itching
- Numbness at exposure site
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Nervous system damage
- Hyperactivity
- Hypersensitivity
- Disorientation
- Hallucinations
- Seizures
- Paralysis
- Hydrophobia-fear of water

Be proactive and have livestock and pets vaccinated against the rabies virus. *If you are exposed, follow these steps:*

1. Clean the wound site thoroughly with soap and water.
2. Seek immediate medical attention. The rabies vaccine is a series of 5 injections that are administered after an exposure. The rabies immune globulin (RIG) injection is administered with the first vaccine injection if it is a person's first time exposed to the virus.

Remember...

- Producers and veterinarians should exercise extreme caution with animals who exhibit rabies symptoms, like excessive salivation.
- Although it is important to quarantine and destroy an animal you suspect is infected with rabies, **do not shoot it in the head**. The only way to confirm the presence of the rabies virus in an animal is to test brain tissue.

References:

<http://www.healthscout.com/ency/68/738/main.html>

<http://agriflifelogs.tamu.edu/mt/VetMed/2007/08/rabies.html>

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/vme-fact/0001.html>