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## **Rabies & Livestock**

Everyone is familiar with the story “Old Yeller,” and the tragedy that struck a beloved pet. To my bafflement, I recently learned that rabies could present in many forms, not just the famed furious form; foaming mouth and furious rage.

There are at least three descriptions of rabies. In the *dumb form*, most common in cattle, animals are profoundly depressed and don’t eat. This is the opposite of the furious form already mentioned. These animals are passive and it’s easy not to consider rabies. In the *paralytic form*, animals may be lame or unstable, unable to maintain proper movement of their limbs. In the familiar *furious form*, animals are excitable, easily startled, and show rage. They may also strain as if constipated and appear to be choking. They are unable to swallow, so they drool and won’t eat or drink. Finally, some of these animals may bellow relentlessly, with cows often sounding like bulls.

All mammals are susceptible to the rabies virus. Wild mammals like raccoons, foxes, and skunks maintain and spread the virus. Infection of dogs and cats often occurs from fighting, while livestock is more likely to be bitten on the muzzle, udder, or feet. Saliva is the commonly known bodily fluid known to transmit rabies, but spinal fluid, milk, and respiratory mucus can also be contaminated, simply being in the presence of a rabid animal can be risky. Think of entering a cave inhabited by rabid bats; I shudder to consider this scenario!

The rabies virus is endemic in our part of the world, with the skunk being the primary carrier. Within the past 5 and half months, there have been seven positive cases across Kansas; 6 skunks and one bat. These incidences have occurred across the state, in Cheyenne, Meade, Ford, Reno, Lincoln, and Sedgewick counties.

The rabies virus must travel from the site of infection to the brain to become symptomatic. So, a bite on the nose will create symptoms much faster than a bite on a back foot. In fact, a wound on the back foot might be mostly healed when symptoms start. When an animal is suspected to have rabies, it should only be handled by a veterinarian. Most vets are routinely vaccinated so they have an extra layer of protection, along with proper protective gear. If you must handle these animals, latex gloves or palpation sleeves should be worn to protect your skin from exposure. This includes handling the remains of possible rabid animals. Most of us who work outside have

cuts on our hands all the time, making us vulnerable to the virus entering our skin. Never stick your unprotected hand into the mouth of any animal that appears to be choking. Rabies can only be diagnosed in animals by necropsy.

Rabies must be considered whenever you have an animal with a change in behavior or the appearance of neurologic disease. There is no treatment for animals. So, get pets vaccinated, even barn cats, and discuss vaccination of livestock with your veterinarian if you are in a high-risk area.

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