

Rabies Remains a Concern in Eastern Colorado

With Rabies in a horse confirmed in Eastern Colorado this month it become more important for animal owners to be aware of the symptoms. Precautions should be taken to prevent coming in contact with this disease.

Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Domestic animals account for less than 10% of the reported rabies cases, with cats, cattle, and dogs most often reported rabid. Rabies virus infects the central nervous system, causing encephalopathy and ultimately death. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

It is important to be aware of rabies and not approach any animal that is acting abnormally. Rabies may be transmitted by any contact with saliva or a bite from an infected animal. There are many signs that suggest rabies in an animal. Some of these can be host specific or related to the strain of the rabies virus that you are dealing with. Often times, the signs may simply be "acting strange". Perhaps the host animal will be depressed or lethargic and may not be eating or drinking. Some animals may become vicious and attack anything that moves and sometimes things that do not move. One of the later signs is that the animal may not be able to swallow and begins to froth at the mouth.

Rabies may be classified as either dumb or furious rabies. Sixty percent of dog cases are the dumb variety. These animals may have a paralyzed mouth and/or tongue. Sometimes the paralysis will begin in the hindquarters and move forward. Those with furious rabies will hide in dark locations, become restless, vocal, and potentially vicious. They may roam for miles and attack anything that gets in their way.

Protect yourself and your animals by contacting your veterinarian for a rabies vaccination for your animals. Do not approach any wild animals or strange acting domestic animals. Watch for animals acting abnormally, such as animals which are normally only seen at night, being out and moving about during the day. Also watch you domestic livestock for sign of strange behavior

If you suspect an animal of having rabies, contact your veterinarian, health department or sheriff's department immediately. Additional information is available on the Golden Plains Area Extension Website: goldenplains.colostate.edu