

Rabies poses threat for horses too

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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What are the risks of your horse getting rabies? How many horses get rabies? How much of a threat does a rabid horse pose to you?

These are all questions we find ourselves asking rarely—luckily, like the reoccurrence of these questions in our mind, rabies in horses is not very common. Although this disease is not very common in northeastern Colorado, it is a very serious and fatal disease to those that come in contact with it.

Horses are not as susceptible to rabies as cows or cats and dogs, because of their flight instincts. Cows are slower and domestic animals are often attracted to wild strange-acting animals. Here are some symptoms to look for in a rabid horse.

First, one should realize horses usually form the “dumb” (stuporous) form rather than the “furious” form, which means they are depressed rather than violent. When horses become infected with rabies, they may bite or chew on the area where they were bit, also eating and drinking is dramatically reduced.

Over time, the diseased horse will show more signs of irritability, disorientation or panic. These are signs of neurological issues obtained with rabies. Usually this includes seizures. The horse will eventually go down and be so disoriented it cannot get up.

In a normal case of rabies the horse will die in a week or less after the first symptoms occur. Symptoms for rabies are not specific and are often confused with other conditions, if a horse is potentially at risk it is important to visit a local veterinarian for a checkup.

There is currently no cure for rabies, but it is recommended any horse with the possibility of being rabid should be quarantined for at least six months, and the wound should be kept clean. Any horse that dies rapidly or of neurological problems should be tested for rabies as soon as

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possible. Also, those that came in contact with that animal should get tested as well. Many labs can conduct rabies antibody titers tests with a brain and confirm whether or not the horse had rabies.

Humans can come in contact with rabies from horses mostly from saliva, and in some cases urine or blood. It is important to wear gloves that protect yourself from saliva or other unsanitary liquid that might come in contact with your hands. It is recommended all horses be vaccinated annually, and owners perform thorough inspections on their horses and act promptly when signs of rabies appear.