

Equine Rabies: Disease Risk and Vaccinations

Rabies is an infrequently encountered neurologic disease of equids. While the incidence of rabies in horses is low, the disease is invariably fatal and has considerable public health significance. ***It is recommended by the American Association of Equine Practitioners that rabies vaccine be a core vaccine for all equids.***

Exposure occurs through the bite of an infected (rabid) animal, typically a wildlife source such as raccoon, fox, skunk or bat. Bites to horses occurs most often on the **muzzle, face and lower limbs**. The virus migrates via nerves to the brain where it initiates rapidly progressive, invariably fatal encephalitis.

A rabid horse often exhibits signs that are non-specific, such as fever and poor appetite. Frequently rabid horses are misdiagnosed with more common ailments, such as colic or choke. This can result in exposure of numerous people to an affected horse. In one study, an **average of 18 humans** were exposed to this deadly virus for each case of rabies in horses.

In 2006, a horse that was kept in stables at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville, TN tested positive for rabies. The horse showed severe neurological problems and was subsequently euthanized.

June 2009: A horse in Kansas has tested positive for rabies. The horse was presented with lameness with the initial exam indicating "something neurological". Tests performed for West Nile Virus were negative and the horse was euthanized after exhibiting aggressive behavior. Tests performed at Kansas State University confirmed the diagnosis of rabies.

Rabies is **preventable through vaccination** of horses and other domestic animals. Annual vaccination is recommended. Contact your veterinarian about rabies vaccination.

Read more about equine rabies at: www.thehorse.com



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