

For Immediate Release

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Horse Rabies Case in Southwest Nebraska

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) has confirmed the second positive rabies case in Southwest Nebraska for the year. The rabies exposure is with a horse in Chase County.

“Rabies in horses occurs with less frequency than in dogs or cats,” explains Melissa Propp, Disease Surveillance Coordinator. “The only way to diagnose rabies is with a laboratory test performed after death. Because the horse’s symptoms may mimic other more common diseases, many people may be exposed to the infected horse while it is infectious. The best method to prevent human exposure is to ensure that horses, livestock and pets are protected against rabies with current vaccinations.”

In horses as in other warm blooded animals; rabies is a severe, rapidly progressive neurological disease. It is transmitted via saliva, most commonly through bite wounds from an infected wild animal. Although symptoms may appear anytime from two weeks up to one year after exposure, on average symptoms appear four to eight weeks after the exposure. Death usually occurs two to four days after the horse begins to show clinical signs.

Rabies should be suspected in all horses that show a sudden onset of rapidly progressing neurological signs. However, horses with rabies may also show a wide range of clinical signs that resemble other more common diseases:

- Depression with loss of appetite
- Low-grade fever
- Abdominal pain or colic (straining to urinate or defecate)
- Lameness and/or incoordination
- Increased sensitivity to touch
- Swallowing problems and drooling
- Odd behavioral changes, nervousness, irritability
- Convulsions or seizures

Per the Colorado Extension Office: the [2011 Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control](http://nasphv.org/Documents/RabiesCompendium.pdf) (<http://nasphv.org/Documents/RabiesCompendium.pdf>) published by the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) recommends that vaccination be considered for valuable livestock, horses traveling interstate, and animals that have frequent human contact (such as public exhibition like fairs and petting zoos).

The American Association of Equine Practitioners lists rabies vaccination as part of the core group of vaccines that should be administered to horses annually due to the rise of rabies across the country and the severity of the disease.

According to the Center for Disease Control, rabies is a medical emergency. Any wounds should be immediately washed with soap and water. They should also receive medical attention from a health

care professional. Rabies is a deadly virus infection that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. People get rabies from the bite of an animal with rabies.

Contact your local veterinarian, local health care provider and public health department in regards to rabies testing and exposures.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins and Red Willow counties. For more information call Melissa Propp, RN at 308-345-4223. SWNPHD is located at 404 West 10th Street, McCook – one block north of Arby's and 501 Broadway, Imperial – entrance on 5th Street. You can also follow SWNPHD on Facebook and Twitter.

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