



Preventing Anthrax in Livestock

Naturally occurring anthrax can emerge in warm weather, so take precautions with your livestock.

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Courtesy USDA/ Keith Weller

Cattle located in an area where anthrax has been reported should receive a vaccine to help prevent the disease.

In certain parts of the U.S., late summertime means livestock producers should be on the lookout for the resurfacing of anthrax in their animals. Anthrax, which is caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, is a naturally occurring disease with worldwide distribution.

“Anthrax cases are not unusual, especially at this time of year. This is peak season for anthrax to resurface and affect livestock and deer,” says Dee Ellis, DVM, Texas Animal Health Commission executive director and state veterinarian. “Ranchers and livestock owners should be aware of recent anthrax confirmations in their area and consider vaccinating their livestock to protect against the disease.”

If an animal dies from the disease and isn't properly disposed of by burning, the anthrax bacteria can spill out into the soil and remain dormant for long periods of time. The anthrax bacteria resurface on grass or forage in ideal weather and soil conditions during spring and summer months. By the time an animal shows signs of staggering, trembling or convulsions after ingesting the anthrax bacteria, death is expected. Animal carcasses, manure and bedding infected with anthrax should be incinerated until thoroughly consumed. This practice keeps wild animals from being exposed to the disease and kills the anthrax bacteria, preventing contamination at another site.

Anthrax is a reportable disease in the U.S. Farmers who notice symptoms of the disease in their livestock should notify the Center for Disease Control and their state health department.

“Outbreaks usually end when cool weather arrives and the bacteria become dormant. In the meantime, producers in or near historically affected areas should consult with their veterinary practitioner about the disease in general, and especially the need to vaccinate,” Ellis says.

The following biosecurity tips can be helpful to livestock producers who suspect they have an animal or carcass infected with anthrax: Wear long sleeves and gloves when handling carcasses or when working with or vaccinating livestock to avoid contaminating any sores or scratches on your arms or hands. See your doctor if you develop an unusual-looking sore on your hands, arms or other exposed skin. Although it's rare to contract skin anthrax, this infection requires treatment with antibiotics prescribed by a physician.

Practice good sanitation. Wash your hands after handling livestock, even if you wear gloves. Disinfect livestock equipment used on the animals or carcasses. Keep pets and children away from carcasses or bones of dead animals. Move healthy animals away from a pasture where animals have died from anthrax.

Properly dispose of animal carcasses by burning to prevent exposure to other animals, such as wildlife or dogs.

Vaccinate livestock if cases occur in the surrounding areas. Anthrax vaccine is a “live” vaccine, so it must not be administered with antibiotics. Vaccinated animals must be withheld from slaughter for two months.

Restrict the movement of livestock onto or from an affected premise until animals can develop immunity through vaccination (about 10 days).