

NYS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & MARKETS
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FAST FACTS ABOUT RABIES

DEFINITION

RABIES IS A RAPIDLY PROGRESSIVE ILLNESS THAT ALMOST ALWAYS INCLUDES NEUROLOGIC SIGNS FOLLOWED BY DEATH. RABIES IS SPREAD BY BITES OF INFECTED RACCOONS, SKUNKS, FOXES, AND BATS. THIS DEADLY DISEASE CAN BE TRANSMITTED FROM HORSES TO HUMANS.

CAUSE

RABIES IS CAUSED BY A VIRAL AGENT, RHABDOVIRUS.

CLINICAL SIGNS

THERE ARE 3 FORMS OF INFECTION AND THE SIGNS CAN BE EASILY CONFUSED WITH THOSE OF OTHER DISEASES: THE "FURIOUS" FORM, A "DUMB" FORM, AND A PARALYTIC FORM. CLINICAL SIGNS CAN INCLUDE: LAMENESS, COLIC, AGGRESSION, SEIZURES, EXCESSIVE SALIVATION, INABILITY TO SWALLOW, OR SENSITIVITY TO LIGHT.

DIAGNOSIS

CLINICAL SIGNS & HISTORY ARE USED TO BASE THE DIAGNOSIS UPON. A DEFINITE DIAGNOSIS BEFORE DEATH IS DIFFICULT, ALTHOUGH TESTS ARE AVAILABLE. THE ONLY RELIABLE TESTS ARE THOSE PERFORMED ON BRAIN AND SPINAL CORD TISSUE AFTER DEATH.

TREATMENT

THERE IS NO TREATMENT TO HALT THE PROGRESS OF RABIES.

PROGNOSIS

ONCE A POSITIVE DIAGNOSIS IS MADE, THE HORSE SHOULD BE EUTHANIZED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

PREVENTION

VACCINATION AGAINST RABIES IS THE EASIEST AND SUREST METHOD OF PROTECTION. REDUCE EXPOSURE TO WILDLIFE.

VACCINATION

VACCINATION SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE ANNUAL PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE PROGRAM. VACCINATED ANIMALS WITH KNOWN EXPOSURE TO RABIES SHOULD BE REVACCINATED QUICKLY AND PLACED UNDER OBSERVATION FOR 3 MONTHS. IF A VACCINATED ANIMAL IS SUSPECTED OF BEING EXPOSED, THE LEVEL OF IMMUNITY CAN BE CHECKED BY A LAB TEST IMMEDIATELY AFTER EXPOSURE. NONVACCINATED ANIMALS WITH A KNOWN EXPOSURE SHOULD BE EUTHANIZED.

-Dr. Lyda W. Denney-