

Just the thought of the word conjures images of the aggressive dog foaming at the mouth. While that is one presentation of the disease, horses can also be infected with this deadly virus.

In horses, the virus is most commonly contacted through infected wild animals such as foxes, raccoons, rats and even bats.

Rabies is a type of virus that is maintained in the wild animal population and results in some of the typical signs that we all know about such as aggression, loss of inhibition, stupor, foaming at the mouth, chomping of the jaws and fear of water.

Although the rabies virus is highly deadly, it is a slow moving virus in the body. This means that when the virus first infects, it takes a long time for the virus to reach the brain where it causes death. During the incubation period, the virus infects the animal and specifically spreads into the saliva of the animal allowing for its ease of spread through bites. As the virus enters the brain and slowly alters the animal's behavior before death, it allows itself a means to live on by changing the animal's behavior and allowing for bites to occur.

In the horse, once bitten, the virus can take anywhere from days to weeks to show the effects. Horses typically do not become aggressive but rather they will become depressed and even slip into a coma before death. Some of the earliest signs may be twitching at the lips and chomping



of the mouth. Some horses will experience aversion to water and may not drink for several days before death. Most horse just become depressed and may foam saliva at the mouth before experiencing seizures and coma.

Once infected and showing signs, there is no cure for rabies in your horse.

Rabies vaccination is the easiest way to protect your horse from developing infection and avoiding death. Vaccination should be performed **once per year due** to the high level of contact your horse has with wild life. Compared with dog and cat recommendations of once every three years which are based on the lower level of direct wild life contact and immune system studies in those animals showing protection at the longer interval.

Rabies is a community health issue as well. A human who has contact with the saliva of an infected animal, horse or otherwise, is at risk for infection with the virus – which can be lethal.

If you suspect that your horse has been bitten by a wild animal or you notice a wild animal acting abnormally around your horses, you can contact your veterinarian for further advice.

Never approach an animal you suspect may have rabies.



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