

Texas Animal Health Commission
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**Anthrax Confirmed in Crockett County;
Ranchers Urged to Vaccinate Livestock**

The Texas drought has added insult to injury, as anthrax has been confirmed in a cow that died in Crockett County. Anthrax bacteria can lie dormant in soil for years, until hot, dry weather conditions trigger the bacteria's germination. Livestock and wildlife can pick up the bacteria as they crop the grass close to the soil. Once they ingest the bacteria, cattle, sheep, goats, horses, deer and other grazing animals can become ill and die within hours.

"Anthrax occurs worldwide, and in Texas, and we typically see cases in a triangle bounded by Uvalde, Ozona and Eagle Pass," said Dr. Bob Hillman, Texas' state veterinarian and head of the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), the state's livestock and poultry health regulatory agency.

"We have heard concerns about anthrax in other counties this summer, but the only laboratory confirmed case is in Crockett County," said Dr. Hillman. "There is no cause for alarm, but we do urge ranchers in the area to vaccinate their grazing livestock, to prevent losses to this naturally occurring disease. The injectable vaccine can be obtained from feed stores or through veterinarians or livestock supply representatives. Unfortunately, there is no approved medication or prevention for free-ranging wildlife. When cooler temperatures roll in, the outbreak will end.

When an area experiences an anthrax outbreak, Dr. Hillman said ranchers should wear long sleeves and gloves when handling or vaccinating livestock. Afterward, good sanitation measures should be followed, including hand washing and laundering of clothing. This aids in preventing contact with the anthrax bacteria which may have been picked up on the hides of animals. Skin exposure to the bacteria can cause a nasty sore that requires appropriate medical treatment. Dr. Hillman also cautioned against picking up bones, horns or shed antlers, and said pets and children should be kept away from dead animals. Healthy animals also should be moved from a contaminated pasture during an outbreak.

"Anthrax 'hot spots' in a pasture are usually limited to very small areas," explained Dr. Hillman. To prevent additional soil contamination, he said TAHC regulations require that animals dead from anthrax be burned, along with their bedding and manure. This prevents wild pigs, coyotes, dogs or other predators from dragging carcasses (and the accompanying anthrax bacteria) from one pasture to another. In severe droughts, that is not always possible, and a waiver of the regulations and alternative disposal may be requested from the TAHC.

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Dr. Hillman said TAHC regulations also require that animals on an infected premises be quarantined for at least 10 days after all the livestock have been vaccinated against the disease. During this time, anthrax-exposed animals will die from the disease without contaminating new areas, while healthy, vaccinated animals will develop immunity.

All anthrax cases--suspected or laboratory confirmed--must be reported to the TAHC. The regulatory agency operates a 24-hour hotline at 1-800-550-8242, with state or federal regulatory veterinarians available at all times to take calls and work with private veterinary practitioners and producers.

“Hunters often ask us about the risks associated with harvesting animals in an area that has experienced an anthrax outbreak,” commented Dr. Hillman. “We do caution against harvesting wild hogs in an affected area during an outbreak. The hogs consume the meat of dead animals and could be carrying the bacteria. Fortunately, by the time deer hunting season starts, cool weather usually puts an end to a season’s outbreak. Harvest only healthy-looking deer and other hoof stock. If a deer has ingested anthrax bacteria, within hours, it will stagger, tremble or exhibit convulsions, and death is inevitable.”