

A horse residing in Nemaha County tested positive for rabies February 22, 2011 at the Kansas State University Rabies Laboratory, Manhattan. The horse was submitted by Dr. Stephanie Vinson of Town & Country Veterinary Clinic, P.C. in Auburn. The horse represents the fourth confirmed positive case of rabies in the state of Nebraska this year.

With this recent positive, Nemaha County has had six animals confirmed positive for rabies since 2000, according to the K-State Rabies Laboratory. Nebraska reported 53 confirmed cases of rabies for 2010.

The risk of exposure to rabies is real, but the disease is preventable in both humans and domestic animals. In the US, there are around 7,000 animal rabies cases diagnosed every year. In the Midwest, skunks and bats are the main sources and the most common animal species positive for rabies. Domestic pets and livestock can be infected from exposure to these wildlife sources of rabies. Rabies prevention consists of vaccinating domestic animals, education of humans to avoid exposures, and providing exposed persons with prompt post-exposure rabies prophylaxis. The World Health Organization reports that ~50,000 people die of rabies infection worldwide every year.

The state of Nebraska requires that all domestic animals (cats and dogs) have a current rabies vaccination provided by a licensed veterinarian. Rabies vaccine is considered one of the core vaccines by the American Association of Equine Practitioners, but the decision whether or not to vaccinate remains on a voluntary basis by the owner.

Southeast District Health Department offers these tips to prevent rabies:

- Have your veterinarian vaccinate all dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, and valuable livestock against rabies.
- If bitten by an animal, seek medical attention and report the bite to Southeast District department immediately.
- If your animal is bitten, contact your veterinarian for advice.
- Do not handle or feed wild animals. Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- If a wild animal appear sick or injured, keep a safe distance from it. Call Southeast District Health Department or Town & Country Veterinary Clinic for assistance.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.

If you have additional questions regarding how to protect of your animals or the potential of human exposure to rabies, please contact Southeast District Health Department at 402-274-3993 or 877-777-0424, or Town & Country Veterinary Clinic at 274-3336.