

News Release

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State Agencies Issue Anthrax Advisory

AUSTIN--The Texas Animal Health Commission, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department have issued a summer and early fall alert for ranchers, hunters and anyone who may be going afield in Texas. One case of anthrax has been confirmed in a white-tailed deer herd on a game ranch in Uvalde County, which is in an area of South Texas endemic to anthrax. Although humans are also susceptible, no cases have been reported to date, and simple precautions can effectively reduce the risks of humans contracting the disease.

Anthrax is a bacterial disease of sheep, goats, cattle, horses, deer and other animals. The bacteria which cause anthrax can remain dormant in the soil for many years. A period of drought followed by heavy rains frequently occurs just before the appearance of anthrax in livestock and deer. Animals that eat the rapidly growing grasses also consume soil that contains the bacteria. Currently, soil conditions are right to produce more outbreaks around the triangular geographic area bounded by Uvalde, Ozona and Eagle Pass, which cover portions of Crockett, Val Verde, Sutton, Edwards, Kinney, and Maverick counties.

Transmission of anthrax to humans can occur whether an affected animal is alive or has died from the disease. Simple precautions can greatly reduce the risk of contracting the disease from these animals. Carcasses of dead livestock and deer should not be cut open to allow blood to escape. Under no circumstances should the hide, hair, skulls, or horns of an animal suspected of having anthrax be salvaged, nor should the meat of these animals be eaten.

During an anthrax outbreak, hunters in the affected areas are discouraged from taking feral hogs because they 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 the often seasonal anthrax outbreak. At minimum, hunters should 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.

When an area experiences an anthrax outbreak, 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. Do not pick up bones, horns or shed antlers, and pets and children should be kept away from dead animals. Healthy animals also should be moved from a contaminated pasture during an

outbreak, but must remain on the premise and not hauled down the road to another pasture.

To prevent additional soil contamination, Texas Animal Health Commission regulations require that anthrax affected animal carcasses must be burned, until thoroughly consumed, along with any associated bedding and manure. This practice prevents wild pigs, coyotes, dogs or other predators from dragging carcasses (and the accompanying anthrax bacteria) from one pasture to another, and spilling out the anthrax spores.

TAHC regulations also require that livestock on 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 may still die from the disease, 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.

More information about anthrax is available by contacting the TPWD Wildlife Division at (512) 389-4505, The Texas Animal Health Commission at (512) 719-0710, or the Zoonosis Control Division, Texas Department of State Health Services, at (512) 458-7255.

On the net:

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/anthrax/>

http://www.tahc.state.tx.us/animal_health/anthrax/anthrax.html