

# NEW YORK STATE 4-H MEAT GOAT PROJECT FACT SHEET #6



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## ROUTINE HEALTH CARE FOR YOUR WETHER

There are certain practices you can adopt to reduce the chances of your goat getting a serious illness. These include 1) checking your goat twice daily to make sure that he appears healthy, 2) setting up and following a treatment program to prevent or control certain common health problems, and 3) providing him with healthy living conditions.

Checking your goat - Take the opportunity to look over your goat and make sure he is his normal healthy self each time you feed and water him (at least twice a day). This way you can catch most health problems when they first start before they get too serious. Remember the check list you used in NY State 4-H Meat Goat Fact Sheet #3 to tell if a goat you were buying looked healthy? Get in the habit of running this check list through your head every time you feed your goat.

Do his eyes look dull or cloudy? Does he have diarrhea? Is he standing hunched up with his tail drooping down? Are his eyes or nose runny? Is he coughing, wheezing, or breathing hard? Is his coat rough, flaky or bald in spots? Does he have any unusual lumps or swellings? Is he lame, stiff moving or having trouble standing or walking? Is his appetite poor? Is he having trouble chewing or swallowing? Does he seem depressed, weak or uninterested in his surroundings? Is he having trouble urinating or is there blood in his urine?

It's also a good idea to keep track of your goat's body condition and hair coat and how they change from season to season. Ask a friend's opinion if you think your wether is getting too skinny or fat on his feed ration. Weigh your wether regularly to make sure he is growing well.

If your wether appears sick, check his vital signs, try to make him comfortable, and then contact a veterinarian or your "consulting goat expert" with your observations and start figuring out what is wrong and what you can do to make him better.

Vital signs -

Rectal temperature - 102 to 103 F is normal for a goat, kids may be higher. Keep in mind that anything that heats your goat up, for example, long hair coat, exercise, or high ambient temperatures (how hot is the air surrounding him) will increase his normal temperature. It's good to compare his temperature to that of other goats in your herd, or to let him calm down if you've been chasing him and then take his temperature again. Use a livestock thermometer or a baby's rectal thermometer available in any drug store. Shake the thermometer down, gently insert it under his tail partway into his rectum (some folks like to put vasoline on the tip of it so it bothers the goat less when it goes in), and hold it there for 3 minutes.

Respiration rate - 12 to 15 breaths per minute, faster for kids. Watch your goat breathe in and out and then count how many breaths he takes in a minute.

Heart rate or pulse - 70 to 80 per minute, faster for kids. Place your fingers on each side of his lower ribcage and feel for his heart beats, count how many heart beats per minute, or count his pulse by placing your hand on the inside of his upper thigh on his rear leg and locating the artery there and then counting the pulses per minute.

Rumen movements - 1 to 2 per minute. Put your fist or palm onto the left flank of your goat to feel for rumen movements. Be sure to take note if touching him there seems to hurt him or if his rumen feels tight as a drum or slushy as if filled with water. These are all signs of health problems.

Health program - find out what vaccination, worming, and Selenium supplementation programs are recommended in your area. Find out how soon before slaughter various vaccines and wormers must be given in order not to leave

drug residues in the goat's meat. Give vaccines just under the skin (SQ) and not directly into the muscle (IM) to avoid bruising your goat's meat. Generally,

Vaccines - Enterotoxemia and tetanus are two very common diseases of goats caused by soil borne bacteria. Vaccinating your goat for these diseases will greatly reduce his chances of getting them. Goat kids are vaccinated for Clostridium C, D and tetanus at about 4 weeks of age and then again 3 to 4 weeks later. If they are in a feed lot situation, the vaccine is often repeated every 4 months to optimize protection. In most herds, adult animals are only vaccinated once per year after they receive their two initial kid boosters. The yearly vaccine is given to does 4 to 8 weeks before they are due to kid so that their newborn kids will be protected against these diseases until they are old enough to effectively vaccinate. When you buy a goat make sure he has had both of the boosters for these diseases. If in doubt, vaccinate him again.

Rabies is a deadly disease passed by skunks, raccoons, foxes, etc. to dogs, livestock and humans. It has been reported in NY. Most 4-H county fairs either require or strongly recommend that you vaccinate your goat for rabies to protect yourself and the general public. The vaccine is given yearly. A licensed veterinarian must give it and your goat must have a permanent tattoo or eartag to identify him for the veterinarian's records. As of May, 1999, there is no labeled vaccine for goats. Instead the rabies vaccine for sheep is used "off-label". Cornell veterinarians are currently doing the research to get the vaccine licensed for goats. Remember, your goat must be at least 3 months old to get the vaccine and must get the vaccine at least two weeks before any fair in order to be considered protected from rabies.

Parasites - Internal worms can be a serious problem particularly in goats that are pastured and in goat kids. Be sure to worm your goat when you bring him home to his new, hopefully worm-free, pen. Pastured herds are often wormed 1) in the cold of winter to eliminate any worms that are overwintering in immature stages in the goats' guts, 2) at kidding when the hormones released at kidding trigger a large release of worm eggs in the goat's manure, and 3) sometimes in the spring before being put out to pasture. They are then wormed if they get too "wormy" from mid summer to fall when being moved to clean sections of pasture. Your wether should be wormed at weaning and then periodically throughout the summer as needed.

Lice can become a problem in early spring as goats start to shed their winter coats. Always look for lice if you notice flaky or itchy coats and treat as necessary

Coccidia is caused by a tiny parasite in a goat's gut. Older goats become resistant to it but it can be deadly in goat kids especially when they go through the stress of weaning or are overcrowded. It is a good idea to treat your wether for coccidia during weaning and also when you first get him either by feeding him a feed that contains a preventative or by drenching him with a coccidiostat like Sulmet or Corid.

Selenium is a mineral necessary to goats that is lacking in NY soils and, thus, lacking in our hay and grain. Kids are usually given about 1 cc of a **BoSe** shot shortly after birth. If your kid was not given a shot at birth you should 1) give him a BoSe shot when you get him, or 2) give him a loose salt or feed daily that contains Selenium and vitamin E.

Healthy Living Conditions - Hopefully, you've built a clean, dry, well ventilated shed for your goat that protects him from extreme cold, heat, rain and snow and is spacious enough to avoid overcrowding. Overcrowded goats tend to get sick. Keep his manger and waterer clean and poop free. During hot weather, place his water bucket in the shade where it will stay cool longer. Wash bottles and nipples for kids right after each use.

### Suggested Activities

- 1) Have your 4-H group take each others' oral temperatures and pulse and respiration rates. Then practice together measuring temperatures, pulse, respiration and rumen movements on some goats. Get together with the rest of your 4-H group and learn how to give shots and drench goats properly.
- 2) Make a poster or drawing (good idea for Cloverbuds) of some of the symptoms of a sick goat. You can hang your poster in your shed or room to use as a checklist or use it as part of an oral presentation.
- 3) Take a calendar and write on it when your wether was born. Based on this date, calculate what dates you should plan on disbudding, vaccinating, worming, and castrating him. Consider legal withdrawal periods.