ROUTINE HEALTH CARE FOR YOUR GOAT

There are certain practices you can adopt to reduce the chances of your goat (or goats if you have more than one!) getting a serious illness. These include:

1) Check your goats at least two times a day to make sure they are all healthy, 2) Set up a health program for your goats to prevent or control common health problems, and 3) Provide your goats with healthy living conditions.

**Checking your goat** - Look over your goat each time you feed and water (at least twice a day) to make sure he is his happy, normal self. 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 Working Goat Fact Sheet #2** 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. You can even hang the list up next to your feed.

Do his eyes look dull or cloudy? Are the membranes on the inside of his lower eyelid pale? 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 his stomach abnormally distended as if he is bloated? Is he having trouble chewing or swallowing? Does he seem depressed, weak or uninterested in his surroundings? Is he having trouble urinating? If your goat is a milking doe, does her udder seem swollen, hot or abnormally cold? Is her milk clotted or bloody? The answer should be “NO” to all these questions!

It is also a good idea to keep track of your goat’s body condition and hair coat. How do his weight and coat change from season to season? Ask your 4-H leader’s opinion if you think that your goat is getting either too skinny or too fat on the amount of feed you are giving him. If your goat is a growing goat kid, try to weigh him at least once a month or even weekly too make sure he is growing well. You can use either a scale or a goat weigh tape to estimate his weight.

If your goat appears sick, quickly check his “vital signs” and write them down. Make your goat comfortable and contact a veterinarian or your “consulting goat expert” with your observations so you can figure out what is wrong and what you need to do to make him better. Your veterinarian may need to see the goat to decide what is wrong. If your goat does not want to eat or is having trouble urinating, you need to get help fast!

Here are a goat’s vital signs:

**Rectal temperature** - 102° to 103° F is a normal temperature for a goat. 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. Gently insert the thermometer under his tail partway into his rectum (some folks like to put vaseline on the tip of it so it bothers the goat less when it goes in), and hold it there for 3 minutes.
or until it “beeps”.

**Respiration rate** – normal is about 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** – normal is about 70 to 80 per minute, faster for kids. Place your fingers on each side of his lower ribcage and feel for his heartbeats, count how many heartbeats 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 is normal. 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 may be signs of bloat.

**Set Up a Health Program** - find out what vaccination, deworming, and Selenium supplementation programs are recommended in your area. Find out how soon before slaughter various vaccines and dewormers must be given in order not to leave drug residues in the goat’s milk or meat. Generally we give vaccines just under the skin (SQ) and not directly into the muscle (IM) to avoid bruising your goat’s muscle.

**Enterotoxemia** and **tetanus** are two very common and deadly diseases of goats caused by certain types of bacteria in the genus “Clostridium”. Another common name for Enterotoxemia that is easier to say is “overeating disease”. Vaccinating your goat for these deadly diseases is the safest way to prevent your goat from getting them. The vaccine is often called a “CD/T” vaccine. Goat kids should get injected with their first booster of **CD/T vaccine** at about 6 weeks of age followed by their second booster 3 to 4 weeks later. Some goat raisers like to vaccinate the kid as early as 4 weeks of age. However, if they are vaccinated at this early age, it is recommended that they still get another booster at 6 weeks of age and yet another at about 10 weeks of age in order to be truly protected. If your goat is being fed a lot of grain, you may want to repeat the vaccine as often as 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 3 to 6 weeks before they are due to kid so that their newborn kids will also be protected against these diseases until they are old enough to be able to get protection from their own vaccination. The kid must drink the colostrum (the thick milk a mother goat gives for 24 hours after kidding) from a vaccinated mother in order to be protected. The protection from the colostrum starts to wear off when the kid is about 6 weeks old. This is why we can and should effectively vaccinate the kid with two boosters starting at that age. When you buy a goat make sure he has had both of the boosters for these diseases. If in doubt, vaccinate him again. If you buy a bottle kid and do not know if he got plenty of colostrum from a mother vaccinated for overeating disease and tetanus, you will need to give him an injection of **Tetanus Antitoxin** before castrating or disbudding him. Then give him his boosters when he is old enough to start getting them.

**Rabies** is a deadly disease that can be passed in the saliva (spit) from an infected mammal to a healthy mammal. Commonly infected mammals in New York include bats, skunks, raccoons, and foxes. An infected animal can bite your pet, livestock or even you and pass on the disease! This is why you should always get your dog a **rabies vaccine**. It is also a good idea to vaccinate working goats for rabies. Your pack goat could get bitten by an infected bat on the trail and you might not even know it had happened! Goats shown at the NYS Fair and at most 4-H county shows are required to be vaccinated for rabies to protect you and the general public. A licensed veterinarian must give the rabies vaccine to your goat each year. Your goat must have a permanent tattoo or special ear tag to identify him for the veterinarian’s records. There is no labeled vaccine for goats. Instead the rabies vaccine for sheep is used “extra-label”. Talk to your veterinarian about vaccinating your goat for rabies.

**Parasites** – parasites are living things that live on or in another living thing and harm the host by using it for food. Parasitic worms can live in the gut (gastrointestinal tract) of goats. The gastrointestinal tract includes all the digestive organs, for example, the stomach and the intestines. If a goat gets too many
of these worms, the goat can get very weak and even die. Goat kids and goats on pasture are more likely to get too many worms than adult goats who live mostly indoors. Be sure to give your goat a medicine that will kill worms when you bring him home to his new home. We call this type of medicine a “dewormer”. We used to think that you should deworm your goat several times during the year regardless of whether he had lots of worms. However, deworming your goat when he does not need to be dewormed actually makes the worms more likely to get “resistant” to the medicine. If this happens the worms will become resistant to the dewormer and it will no longer kill worms when you really need it to. Nowadays we usually look for the signs of worms or take a manure sample to see if there are substantial worm eggs in the manure before we decide to deworm a goat. You should check your goat for signs of worms several times a year especially during the summer grazing season. Talk to your veterinarian and 4-H leader to learn more about worms and how to tell if your goat needs to be dewormed.

Goats can also get external parasites such as tiny wingless insects called lice. Lice can become a problem especially in winter and early spring. Goats get a fuzzy coat of cashmere this time of year that is a perfect home for lice. Always look for lice if you notice flaky or itchy coats and treat as necessary. 

**Coccidiosis** is a disease caused by *coccidia*. *Coccidia* are tiny one celled parasites in a goat’s gut. Older goats become resistant to coccidia but coccidia can be deadly if they get too numerous in goat kids or yearlings especially when goats go through the stress of weaning, moving to a new home or are overcrowded. Talk to your 4-H goat leader and veterinarian about recommended methods to prevent and treat coccidia. There are several goat feeds available that contain medications to help prevent coccidiosis by keeping the coccidia from getting too numerous. We call these medications, *coccidiostats*. One example of a coccidiostat used in feed is decoquinate (sold as Deccox®). Because weaning and moving can be so stressful, goat kids are sometimes treated for coccidia for 5 to 6 days during these stressful times by putting a coccidiostat such as amprolium (sold as Corid®) in their water or drenching them with it directly. Some coccidiostats require a veterinarian prescription in order to use them. Talk to your veterinarian about the signs of coccidiosis and how to prevent and treat it.

Selenium is a mineral necessary to goats that is lacking in NY soils and, thus, in the hay and grain grown here. A goat kid lacking in selenium may get a deadly disease called “White muscle disease”. Kids are often given an injection (BoSe) or oral paste containing Selenium and Vitamin E shortly after birth to prevent the disease. Selenium can also be included in your grain or salt mix. Talk to your veterinarian and 4-H leader about ways to supplement selenium and vitamin E in your goat’s diet.

**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 are more likely to get sick. Keep your goat mangers and water buckets or waterers clean and poop free. During hot weather, try to place your goat’s water bucket in the shade where it will stay cool longer. Wash the equipment (bottles, nipples, lambars) you use to feed bottle kids carefully right after each use. Dirty equipment can give your kid diarrhea.

**Suggested Activities**

1) Have your 4-H group practice taking each other’s oral temperature, pulse and respiration rates. Then measure temperature, pulse, respiration and rumen movements on a goat and compare your results.
2) Get together with your 4-H group to learn how to properly give injections and dewormers.
3) Take a goat parasite management class that includes FAMACHA© certification.
4) Make a poster of the life cycle of a specific goat parasite or of the signs of a specific disease. Include information about how you would normally prevent or treat that parasite or disease.
5) Make a poster or drawing of some of the signs of a sick goat. You can hang your poster up as a checklist or use it as part of an oral presentation (Activity is suitable for Cloverbuds).
6) Be sure to regularly fill out the health records for your goat in your project record book!