

General Health Guidelines for Meat Goats

Rachael Boyle, K-State Research and Extension Phillips-Rooks District

There are certain practices you can adopt to reduce the chances of your meat goat getting a serious illness. These include providing healthy living conditions, checking twice daily for a healthy appearance, and setting up and following a treatment program to prevent or control certain common health problems.

Goats have fairly simple needs. They need a dry, well ventilated shelter that protects them from extreme cold, heat, rain and snow. It should be spacious enough to avoid overcrowding. Goats need access to clean, fresh water at least twice a day, and more often during extreme heat. During hot weather, place the water bucket in the shade where it will stay cool longer. Goats need an adequate and clean bunk space to eat from. They need exercise for their own health and to maintain structural soundness. Goats will benefit from social interaction with other goats. They do best in a consistent environment; dramatic changes and other stresses can have adverse effects.

Frequent observation of your goat is important. You will learn what normal is for your goat and be able to detect an abnormal behavior. This could be the first sign of a problem. Take the opportunity to look over your goat each time you feed and water (at least twice a day). Early identification of sickness or injury, along with early intervention, maximizes the chance of a good outcome. Utilize the following checklist to determine if your goat may be sick.

Healthy Goat Check List		
	No	Yes
Are eyes dull or cloudy?		
Are eyes or nose very runny?		
Standing hunched up with tail drooping down?		
Have diarrhea?		
Coughing or breathing hard without having just done hard exercise?		
Coat rough and flaky or any bald spots?		
Gums and insides of eyelids very pale?		
Straining to urinate?		
Unusual lumps or swellings on body, legs or udder?		
Lameness or stiff moving?		
Poor appetite?		
Depressed or weak and uninterested in surroundings?		
Rumen movements and sounds? Normal is about 1-2 per minute		
Temperature? Normal is usually 101.5-103.5°F		
Respiratory rate? Normal is about 12-24 breaths per minute		
Heart rate? Normal is about 70-80 beats per minute		

If your goat appears sick, check the vital signs, try to make comfortable, and then contact a veterinarian with your observations and start figuring out what is wrong and what you can do to make the goat better.

Use the following recommendations to check the goat's vital signs.

Rectal temperature - Use a livestock thermometer or a baby's rectal thermometer available in any drug store. Shake the thermometer down; lubricate the end with petroleum jelly or a water based lubricant. Straddle the goat, if possible, so that you are looking at the hindquarters. Lift the tail and gently insert the thermometer under the tail partway into the rectum and hold it there for 3 minutes. Remove thermometer and read the results. Normal is 101.5-103.5°F. Kids may have a higher normal temperature and temperatures could be higher during hot weather.

Respiration rate – With the goat as calm as possible, placing a hand on its side if necessary, count each inhalation, or expansion of the chest wall. Normal is about 12 to 24 breaths per minute.

Heart rate or pulse - Place your fingers on the left side of the lower ribcage and feel for the heart beat, count how many heart beats per minute. Normal is 70-80 beats per minute. Kids may have a higher heart rate.

Rumen movements and sounds - Put your fist or palm onto the left flank of the goat to feel for rumen movements. You should feel a churning or rumbling. Be sure to take note if touching there seems to hurt or if the rumen feels tight as a drum or slushy as if filled with water. Normal rumen movements and sounds are about 1-2 per minute.

Common health problems can be avoided by following a treatment plan devised to prevent or control them. Be sure to check all withdrawal times when administering vaccines and/or medicated feeds. Two very common diseases of goats caused by soil borne bacteria are enterotoxemia and tetanus. Vaccinating your goat for these diseases will greatly reduce the chances of getting them. Goat kids should be vaccinated with *Clostridium perfringens* Type C&D and tetanus at about 4 weeks of age and then again 3 to 4 weeks later. When you buy a goat make sure they have been vaccinated and if in doubt, vaccinate the goat again.

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 them home to the new, hopefully worm-free, pen. Additional worming may be needed throughout the summer.

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 goat for coccidia during weaning and also when you first get him either by feeding a feed that contains a preventative or by drenching with a coccidiostat like Sulmet or Corid.

Ringworm can be a common skin disease. It's typically noticed by a loss of hair in small circular patches. Treatment and prevention includes bleach and fungicides. To prevent infection never share equipment with others and/or thoroughly clean all equipment taken to shows and never show an infected animal.

It's important to get your goat out and go to a show. Getting them used to the environment will lessen the risk of stress or sickness later on. This also helps you get used to working with your goat in an environment other than the place they are most comfortable. You'll want to remember to follow these important disease prevention recommendations. Segregate your goat from other livestock if possible. Restrict use of feed, equipment, and trailers to your animals and disinfect after use. Feed and bedding used at the show should not be brought home. Isolate goat from others upon returning home from the show.

By following these general health guidelines you should be able to detect if your goat is healthy and if not then respond in a timely manner. If you have questions ask others in the project, breeders, veterinarians, and extension staff. They'll be more than happy to help you with your meat goat project.