

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

By Dr. tatiana Luisa Stanton
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Cornell University, Ithaca , NY 14853



ROUTINE HEALTH CARE FOR YOUR DAIRY DOE

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 she appears healthy, 2) setting up and following a treatment program to prevent or control certain common health problems, and 3) providing her with healthy living conditions.

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

Do her eyes look dull or cloudy? Does she have diarrhea? Is she standing hunched up with her tail drooping down? Are her eyes or nose runny? Is she coughing, wheezing, or breathing hard? Is her coat rough, flaky or bald in spots? Does she have any unusual lumps or swellings? Is she lame, stiff moving or having trouble standing or walking? Is her appetite poor? Is she having trouble chewing or swallowing? Does she seem depressed, weak or uninterested in her surroundings? Does her udder feel abnormally hot, cold or tender when you milk her? Does her milk have blood or milk clots in it or smell or taste bad?

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 doe is getting too skinny or fat on her feed ration. Goat kids should be weighed regularly to make sure they are growing well.

If your doe appears sick, check her vital signs, try to make her 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 her 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, longhair coat, exercise, or high ambient temperatures (how hot a day it is) will increase her normal temperature. It's good to compare her temperature to that of other goats in your herd, or to let her calm down if you've been chasing her and then take her 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 her tail partway into her rectum (some folks put petroleum jelly on the thermometer 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 she takes in a minute.

Heart rate or pulse - 70 to 80 per minute, faster for kids. Place your fingers on each side of her lower ribcage and feel for her heartbeats. Then count how many heartbeats per minute. You can count her pulse by placing your hand on the inside of her upper thigh on her rear leg and locating the artery there. Then count 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 your touching her there seems to hurt her or if her rumen feels tight as a drum or slushy as if filled with water. These are all signs of health problems.

Health program – first, check with a knowledgeable veterinarian to find out what vaccination, deworming, and Selenium supplementation programs are recommended for goats in your area. Generally,

Vaccines - Enterotoxemia and tetanus are two very common diseases of goats caused by soil borne bacteria. Vaccinating your goat can greatly reduce her chances of getting them. Goat kids are vaccinated with toxoids 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 feedlot 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 6 weeks before they are due to kid. This way their newborn kids will be protected against these diseases until they are old enough to receive effective protection from the boosters. Be sure your goat has been vaccinated for these diseases when you buy her. If in doubt, revaccinate her.

Rabies is a deadly disease passed by skunks, raccoons, foxes, etc. to dogs and livestock and eventually to 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 her 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". When you use a vaccine or medication for a different livestock species than the ones listed on its label, you need a signed statement from a veterinarian authorizing this "off-label" use. 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 kids. Dairy does that are kept indoors in barns year round are generally dewormed when dried off and then again at kidding. Be sure to use a dewormer that is licensed for milking animals. You can have a fecal test done to determine the correct dewormer to use. Pastured herds are often dewormed 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 and their kids are then dewormed if they get too "wormy" from mid summer to fall and moved to a clean section of pasture at the same time. Kids are often dewormed at weaning.

Lice can become a problem in early spring as goats start to shed their winter coats. Always look for lice if you see 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 kids for coccidia immediately prior or during weaning by feeding them a grain mix that contains a preventative or by drenching them 5 consecutive days with a coccidiostat like Sulmet or Corid.

Selenium is a mineral necessary to goats that is lacking in NY soils and, thus, in our hay and grain. Does are usually injected with 1 cc of MuSE or 5 cc of BoSe yearly right before breeding starts to supplement them for selenium and vitamin E. Kids are given about 1 cc of a **BoSe** shot shortly after birth. You can also opt to give a loose salt or feed daily that contains sufficient Selenium and vitamin E or to give the injections twice per year.

Healthy Living Conditions - Hopefully, you've built a clean, dry, well-ventilated shed for your goat that protects her from extreme cold, rain and snow and is spacious enough to avoid overcrowding. Overcrowded goats tend to get sick. Keep her manger and waterer clean and poop free. Wash bottles and nipples for kids right after each use. Use clean milking procedures so your doe's udder doesn't get infected (get mastitis).

Suggested Activities

- 1) Have your 4-H group take each other's oral temperatures and pulse and respiration rates. Then practice together measuring temperatures, pulse, respiration and rumen movements on some goats.
- 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 doe is due to kid or when your doe kid is due to be bred. Based on these dates, calculate what dates you should plan on vaccinating, worming, etc., your goats. You can also write down other dates like when you plan to dry off your doe, disbud her kids or wean kids from milk.