

A Few Basic Livestock Vetting Needs for Homesteaders

If you own livestock, you should learn how to administer routine vaccinations and various shots and how to administer different medicines. Experienced livestock owners will have no problem handling such tasks, but they also can perform procedures like de-horning, de-worming, treating wounds, and castration.

Think about it like this, if you notice your cow or horse get injured, let's say, by a rusty nail, you will probably call your local animal clinic and ask for the veterinarian to come by and take a look at the animal.

However, if your veterinarian is not available due to an emergency, you will probably be instructed to come by and get a tetanus antitoxin injection. You will have to administer it intramuscularly to your animal immediately. Can you do this yourself, or do you look for another veterinarian?

Or perhaps, your cow is not eating, and it has a runny nose and a nasty cough. When you call the vet's office, they ask you what the animal's temperature is. Do you know how to take her temperature?

This article cannot (and it is not intended to) replace the skills and knowledge of your local veterinarian. It aims to provide some quality information on how to perform a few medical treatments and procedures. As an animal owner, such knowledge not only will reduce the costs associated with raising livestock but can also alleviate the suffering of your animals and even save their lives when the vet is not available.

Before we move forward, it is mandatory to mention that if you decide to treat your livestock, follow the direction on the

medication label carefully and the directions provided by your veterinarian.



Taking an animal's temperature

Taking the animal's temperature is an important step that helps in diagnosing an illness but also in prescribing proper medication. When you call the vet's office, they will first ask you about the temperature of the animal, and you should be able to answer that question.

It is mandatory to take the temperature of an animal that acts abnormally before you give it any medication or apply a certain treatment. If you provide medication before taking the temperature, you will not know if the medicine changed the animal's temperature or if the animal had an abnormal temperature in the first place.

For example, an infection present in the body of an animal

will raise its temperature since the body tries to fight the bacteria. If the animal has an abnormal temperature, that is often a sign of shock. Since the temperature can vary from one animal to another, it will be useful to keep a record of the normal temperatures of your animals.

Taking the animal's temperature is done rectally, and it's the best way to obtain an accurate reading. To do this, you can use a veterinarian thermometer, and if one isn't available, you could also use a digital one designed for human use.

You should not leave the animal unattended when taking its temperature and maintain hold of the thermometer and the animal's tail during the entire process. If you aren't doing so, you risk losing the thermometer, and the retrieval process will be an unpleasant one.

Before inserting the thermometer into the animal's rectum, make sure you lubricate it properly. Regarding the insertion depth, this depends on the size of the animal, but in general, 1-2 inches should be enough. Wait as required until the thermometer beeps or 3 minutes have passed. Remove the thermometer and obtain the reading, and clean it after each use.



Performing injections

Injectations are used because the medication that needs to be administered is absorbed rapidly. Regular vaccinations, emergency drugs, antibiotics, and some de-wormers are mostly administered by injections.

There are two common injection methods used by livestock owners, intramuscular injections (IM) and subcutaneous (SQ).

As the name implies, IM injections should be administered in the muscle mass, and the body areas used for IM injections are the neck, the shoulders, or the hindquarters.

SQ injections need to be administered under the skin, and any body area with loose skin is suitable for the SQ method.

The syringes used are calibrated in cubic centimeters (cc) or milliliters (ml), and the medication prescribed for the injection is also measured using the same scale. In certain

cases, the veterinarian will provide you with pre-measured and filled syringes, and you won't have to worry about measuring the medicine yourself.

If that's not the case, you can easily fill the syringe with the required dose by checking the calibration on it. As long as you pay attention, there's no way you won't be able to determine the proper dosage.

To fill the syringe, remove the foil cap on the medication bottle that covers the rubber top. Now hold the bottle upside down and just insert the needle through the rubber until it reaches the fluid. Gently pull back the plunger of your syringe and withdraw the desired amount.

After you've obtained the recommended dosage, you can remove the needle from the rubber cap, and you should inspect the syringe for air. Hold the syringe with the needle upward and flick it with your finger until the air bubbles rise. Now gently squeeze out a small amount to make sure there is no air present in the syringe. Place the cover on the needle until you are ready to administer the medication.

You will need to restrain the animal or have some help you hold it, but it's also recommended to provide food to the animal as an act of distraction.

On the site you've selected for the injection, you can cleanse it with alcohol to prevent infection and complications. It's impossible to completely sterilize skin covered with hair, but you should still rub it with alcohol.

In general, SQ injections are less painful for the animal, and they are more easily administered. In case you have to administer drugs IM, if you don't hit the muscle mass and give it SQ, the drugs may cause abscesses and irritation.

For SQ injections, locate the area with loose skin as previously stated and insert the needle just under the skin.

You will feel the needle penetrate the skin, and once it breaks through, you can inject the medication and then remove the needle. After removing the needle, it's recommended to rub the injection area vigorously to prevent any leaking and help the absorption of the medicine. In case you need to administer a large volume, never use the same body area and use different sites.

IM injections are quite difficult for beginners, but there's a learning curve that gets easier with each injection given. Once you have picked and cleaned the site, you will have to remove the needle from the syringe without depressing the plunger. Now slap or firmly punch the injection area several times so that the nerves in the skin tingle. Plunge the needle into the muscle but pay attention not to go in too deep and hit the bone.

Now attach the syringe to the needle and drawback gently on the plunger. If you notice any blood entering the syringe, chances are you've hit a blood vessel, and you need to retract or advance the needle. In some cases, you will need to remove the needle completely and select another site. Once you manage to inject the drug, remove the needle and massage the area.



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Administer oral medication

In case of systemic therapy or if the animal has any gastrointestinal problems, oral medication is usually given. Providing oral medication can be troublesome depending on the

animal's size and strength, and it's recommended to restrain it before administering the medication.

If liquid medication is recommended, this can be given as a drench, using either a drenching bottle or syringe. Use only plastic containers and avoid any type of glass container since these can easily break if the animal bites or if it moves frenetically and you bang the container against the animal's teeth.

To make the medication more palatable, you can mix it with molasses, honey, or corn syrup. Also, give small amounts rather than large ones so the animal can have enough time to swallow in between doses.

Immobilize the animal and tilt its head upward but not too much since tilting it too much will lead to choking. Now insert the tube of the drenching bottle over the tongue and between the teeth toward the throat. Administer the medicine slowly, and in case choking occurs, stop and let the animal recover.

If pills or boluses are recommended, these are given using a balling gun, and it's a much easier process compared to administering liquid medication. Lubricate the bolus with cooking oil, place it in the gun and insert the gun in the animal's mouth. Make sure the gun is inserted over the tongue and between the teeth toward the throat. Now depress the trigger, and the bolus should be popped down the animal's throat.

In case you need to give the medication with a stomach tube, I recommend seeking help from an experienced livestock owner or requesting your veterinarian's assistance. This is a delicate procedure, and if it's not done properly, you can insert the tube into the animal's lungs or damage its esophagus.

In some cases, your job can be made much easier if the medication can be mixed with the animal's feed or water. I

said much easier, and indeed it's less of a hassle compared to the other methods, but you still have to convince the animal to eat or drink.

There are some tricks here, too, and for medication mixed in the water, it is recommended to change the flavor of the water a few days prior to adding the medication to the water. You can use molasses, pickle juice, and other sweet juices to flavor the water.

Regarding the medication that should be added to the animal's feed, you can disguise the taste by adding corn syrup or molasses to the feed. My father-in-law usually applies a small amount of Vicks to the nose of his animals if this trick doesn't work. Instead of smelling the medication, the animals smell the Vicks, and being used to the smell; they will consume the feed.

Basic first aid

On the homestead, all animals are prone to injuries or accidents. You will have to deal with cuts or various injuries, and before doing anything about such injuries, you need to maintain your calm and not panic.

Check how bad the animal is actually injured (because, in your perception, it may look worse than it seems) and call your veterinarian. Describe the injury to them and take pictures of the injuries and send them to your veterinarian. Based on your description and the photos provided, he or she will be able to make an informed decision and establish whether or not a visit is required and what treatment is recommended.

In general, the smallest wounds, but also some larger ones, can heal without requiring suturing. You will need to control the bleeding if required by applying direct pressure on the wound. It's recommended to clean the wound with soap and water or antiseptic wash if available. Gently rinse away debris and

dirt and keep the wound as clean as possible. In some cases, you will need to trim hair away from the wound to properly apply an antibiotic cream or powder to that area. Bandaging is not necessarily required unless you are dealing with a large wound.

Your vet may recommend protecting the wound if it's fly season to prevent the flies from laying eggs on the wound or its surrounding area (resulting in maggots). He or she will recommend applying an ointment in and around the wound that also helps control flies.

You may also have to deal with fractures or dislocations, and such injuries occur when the animals fight, they become entangled in a feeder, fence, or farm equipment, or when they are struck by vehicles. You will need to contact the vet to deal with such injuries, and you need to keep the animal calm and prevent it from moving too much until help arrives.

In certain cases, providing first aid to an animal follows more or less the same rules as you would perform the same treatment to an animal.

Concluding

Taking care of your animals requires proper knowledge and skills, and you need to make sure you know what you're doing when the veterinarian isn't available. Besides the knowledge and skills you need to develop, it's also recommended to put together a medicine cabinet for your animals. Talk with your veterinarian and ask them what medicine and accessories you need to keep at hand at all times.

And finally, I recommend reading some books on the topic of treating livestock. For example, *The Merck Veterinary Manual* (by Susan E. Aiello and Michael A. Morse) is an excellent book, and it's highly recommended for those raising livestock.



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