

Letter to the Editor

Cattle rabies in Nawagattegama Veterinary range

Dear Sir,

Rabies is an endemic disease in Sri Lanka. Most often, the disease is reported in domestic or free roaming dogs. It is rapidly progressive meningoencephalitis caused by the Rabies virus or other lyssa viruses. There are a considerable number of human deaths due to Rabies in Sri Lanka and most of these human rabies cases are linked to dog bites. Therefore, there is an enormous attention to prevent and control rabies in the dog population of Sri Lanka. However, it is important to note that the rabies in livestock can also be a source for human rabies. Due to lack of awareness of rabies in cattle, goat and sheep, exact number of cases remains undiagnosed, hence, under estimated. Here we reported five cases rabies in cattle in Nawagattegama veterinary range. Three of these cases were reported in the same farm located in Konkadawala Grama Niladari division.

One year old Jersey cattle was reported to show aggressive behaviour, drooling of saliva, bellowing and was completely off food. Clinical examination revealed that the animal has hyperthermia and nystagmus. The affected cattle was in a herd of six animals and was reared under semi intensive management system. As the condition was suspected of rabies, it was advised to keep the animal in isolation under observation. Two days later the affected animal died.

Another animal, in the same herd of the previous case, started of showing similar clinical signs and died two days later.

On 04th of April 2016, a two month old female calf in the Kahandawa GS division also died after developing clinical signs described above. Head of the dead animal was packed in ice and send to Medical Research Institute, Colombo to check for rabies virus. Laboratory results confirmed that the animal was positive for rabies.

A young cattle, aged one year and two months also developed anorexia and aggressive behaviour on 16th April 2016 and died on the following day. Head of this animal was also send to MRI to check for rabies and was confirmed rabies positive.

On 14th of May 2016, two year old cattle developed similar sign and died on the same day.

According to the farmers who owned these animals, they were not bitten by dogs. However, they were tied in nearby paddy fields during night time. It is unclear whether these cattle infected by rabies virus through a rabid dog, wild animals or through bats. Due to public health risk as well as to the economic losses to the rural farmers, it would be important to vaccinate livestock animals against rabies.

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