

Lecture 4

Appearance of the Healthy Animal

Appearance of the animal

The healthy animal is alert and aware of its surroundings. It is active and holds its head up watching what is happening around it. It should stand on all of its feet. The separation of an animal from the others in its group is often a sign of a health problem.

An animal which is not interested in its surroundings and does not want to move has health problems.

Movement (gait)

The healthy animal will walk easily and steadily with all of its feet taking its weight. Steps should be regular. Irregular movement results from pain in the feet or limbs. Horses normally stand during the day. If you go near an animal that is lying down it should stand up quickly otherwise it has health problems.

Eyes

The eyes should be bright and alert with no discharge at the corners.

Ears

Most animals have erect ears which move in the direction of any sound. Ear movements will also be quick to get rid of flies; the body temperature of the pig can be checked by touching the ear when an unusually high temperature will be noticed.

Nose and Muzzle

The nose should be clean with no discharge. In cattle and buffalo the muzzle should be moist not dry. In sheep and goats the nose should be cool and dry. Healthy animals frequently lick their noses with their tongues.

Mouth

There should be no saliva dripping from the mouth. If chewing is slow or incomplete there must be a problem with the teeth.

The coat

In short-haired animals, e.g. goat and cattle, the hair or coat of the healthy animal will be smooth and shiny. Healthy cattle, buffalo and their calves lick their coat and the lick marks will show. Horses should not sweat when resting. In poultry the feathers should be smooth and glossy and not ruffled. In pigs a curly tail is a sign of good health while a scaly skin points to health problems.

Behaviour

If a horse, cow or buffalo keeps looking at its flanks or kicks at its belly it has a pain in the stomach.

Breathing

Breathing should be smooth and regular at rest. Remember that movement and hot weather will increase the rate of breathing. If the animal is resting in the shade it should be difficult to notice the chest moving as it breathes.

Pulse

Taking the pulse is important when examining an animal. In man the pulse can be easily taken but in animals it is more difficult and requires practice.

1. In sheep and goats you can feel the pulse on the inside of the top of the back leg. The rate of the pulse is 70 - 130 per minute in the adult.
2. The pulse of cattle is taken at a point on the underside of the base of the tail; the normal rate is 40 - 80 per minute in the adult. In buffalo the pulse rate is 40 - 60 per minute.
3. The pulse of the horse is taken on the inside of the cheek. The normal rate is 35 - 40 per minute.

4. The pulse of the camel is taken at a point on the underside of the root of the tail. The normal rate is 35 - 45 beats per minute.
5. In the llama, alpaca and the pig there is no point at which the pulse can be taken. In these animals the beat of the heart itself must be felt for.

Remember that the pulse will be higher in the young animal. To take the pulse you should feel for it with the first two fingers of the hand.

Droppings or dung

The droppings of the healthy animal will be firm. Very soft droppings (diarrhoea) are a sign of ill health. If the animal has difficulty in defecating (constipation) this is also a bad health sign.

Urine

The urine should be clear and the animal shows no signs of pain or difficulty in urinating. Horses, mules and donkeys can have thick yellow urine which is normal.

Appetite and rumination

The animal should eat and drink normally. Failure to eat is an obvious sign of ill health. If feed is available the healthy animal will have a full belly. Pigs will naturally rush at their feed, if they do not something is wrong. Sheep, goats, cattle, buffalo and camels chew the cud (ruminate) for 6 to 8 hours each day. It is a sign of ill health when these animals stop ruminating.

Milk

In the milking animal, a sudden change in the amount of milk produced can mean a health problem. Any sign of blood or other matter in the milk points to infection in the udder. There should be no swelling of the udder and no sign of pain when it is touched. There should be no injury to the teat.

Body temperature

If you suspect that an animal is sick you should take its temperature. Taking the temperature may show a higher than normal body temperature which is sign of an infection.