With expected temperatures of high 90s the next few days, the WVMA reminds livestock owners to take extra precautions during the extreme heat. According to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), when temperatures soar into the upper 90s, even animals accustomed to range conditions can suffer heat stress to the point of illness or death.

“All animals are at risk for heat stress, but animals that are in the last stages of pregnancy, nursing animals, very young or old, or ill are at greatest risk,” says Dr. Robert Ehlenfeldt, DATCP’s State Veterinarian.

Dr. Robert Farruggio, Jefferson Veterinary Clinic, explains heat stress occurs in cattle when they are unable to regulate their body temperature. Heat stress typically happens when the temperature is over 80 degrees Fahrenheit and the humidity is higher than 50 percent.

Signs of livestock heat illness include heavy panting and breathing, drooling, dry or hot skin, and refusal to eat or drink. During extreme heat illness, livestock may become uncoordinated and eventually will lie down but not be able to get up.

If you suspect heat illness in livestock, seek veterinary attention right away.

“Heat stroke requires immediate attention to save the animal,” says Ehlenfeldt. The DATCP suggests moving the animal to a shaded, cooler area, as well as ventilating enclosed areas. Always use lukewarm, never cold, water to sponge down or hose off the animal to lower its temperature.

Fortunately, there are numerous ways livestock owners can prevent heat illness.

“The good news is that with proper care most animal can safely make it through a heat wave,” says Ehlenfeldt.

Ehlenfeldt recommends the following tips to keep livestock safe during the extreme heat:

- At minimum, all animals must have unrestricted access to clean, and preferably cool, drinking water during extreme heat. Animals may double or triple their water intake in extreme weather. Check tanks or buckets several times during the day and, if possible, move them out of direct sunlight. Make sure automatic watering devices are working. Make sure lower ranking animals in the herd are able to get to water; sometimes bossy animals prevent others from drinking. You may want to add a second, or even a third, drinking source in extreme heat to make sure all animals get an adequate intake.

- Try to provide shade for all animals pastured outside. Consider adding shade cloth or tarps to an area to provide shade or open pastures to areas where trees or buildings provide shade. Normally, horses, sheep, goats and cattle do fine in pastures or pens without shade, but when the temperature and humidity level are high these areas become very uncomfortable, even deadly. Also be aware that light-colored animals like pigs and horses can get sunburned.

- If animals are left in buildings, make sure they are not too crowded and that the building is well ventilated. Fans are highly recommended.

- Avoid handling animals and transporting them in extreme heat. Do any chores that would involve stressing the animals in the early morning or late evening when it's cooler. In the case of shows and exhibitions, ask that the schedule be changed to engage in stressful activities like barrel racing when the temperature is cooler. Don't leave livestock in trailers during extreme heat for more than a few minutes.

Dr. Bob Leder, United Veterinary Service, reminds cattle owners to make sure sprinkler systems in free stall barns are working well and the fans are moving air over the cattle with maximum capacity. Air movement coupled with evaporative cooling can greatly reduce the chance for heat illness in livestock.

Be sure not to forget about providing comfort in the cattle holding area.

"An often overlooked area is the holding pen going into the milking parlor," says Leder. "If there

is no cooling system in place in the holding area, soaking the cattle with water to cool them will help.”

Following all these tips can help ensure your livestock beat the heat this summer.

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