INDICATORS OF GOOD BEEF CATTLE HEALTH

Cattle owners should know the signs of good health in their cattle. Good health can be indicated by alertness, regular movement and no sign of lameness, absence of any wounds or injuries and regular feeding habits.

It is also important for cattle owners to know the signs that indicate ill health. These can include listlessness or lack of energy, changes in behaviour or posture, lameness, signs of wounds or illness, coughing, unusual panting or loss of weight.

The following list provides a good basic daily checklist of general guidelines for monitoring the health of beef cattle:

- Beef cattle have strong legs and feet. Heifers, or female cattle, do not have excessive fat or too much muscle.
- Normal movement means that cattle move freely and easily with no hesitation, jerking, limping or circling.
- Cattle stay with their herd. They are naturally curious animals.
- Healthy cattle have a good appetite and eat and drink when offered food and water. After cattle eat, they chew their cud. Ruminants regurgitate coarse foods back to the mouth and mix it with saliva to swallow the food again. Chewing the cud is a sign of a contented, relaxed and usually healthy animal.
- Beef cattle’s skin is smooth and soft. Tight skin can be a sign of dehydration.
- Mucous membranes that line the eye, ear, nose, mouth, anus and vagina are moist and pink. If they are dry or white, the cattle may be abnormal.
- Eyes are clear and bright with no signs of excessive tearing. Ears feel warm.
- Feces do not show any signs of constipation or watery diarrhea.
- Urine is pale yellow in colour.

As well as these indicators of good health, it is imperative that owners know their animal’s individual vital signs. This is known as monitoring the TPR:

- **Temperature** — the normal body temperature is 38.8°C to 39.4°C and should be measured rectally.
- **Pulse** — cattle’s pulse rate can range between 70 to 80 beats per minute. Pulse should be taken by placing your hand over the heart at the floor of the chest. Feel the heart beat with your fingers, not your thumb.
- **Respiration** — average cattle take 35 to 40 inhalations a minute and these can be checked by holding your hand or a mirror in front of its nostrils. Warmer weather can cause panting.
What does the Code of Practice say about medical treatment of cattle?

- When animals require medication, it must be administered as directed by the veterinarian or manufacturer. Treated animals must be properly identified. Only medications approved for use in cattle must be used. Their use must adhere strictly to the recommended dosage and withdrawal period prior to the marketing of the animals. All cattleman should maintain health records of treatments and medication used.

- Strict attention must be paid to dosage levels and withdrawal times either as indicated by label information or as recommended by a veterinarian.

- Minor surgical practices must be conducted only by competent personnel using proper equipment and accepted techniques. Castration and dehorning should be performed at an early age, preferable before weaning, when recovery time is relatively short. Personnel conducting these procedures must take all precautions to avoid unnecessary pain to the animal during the surgery and suffering during its recovery period. When it is necessary to castrate or dehorn a mature animal, the operation should be conducted in consultation with a veterinarian.

- Other surgical procedures must be conducted only by veterinarians or competent, properly trained personnel using accepted surgical techniques and in accordance with the law.
WHAT BEEF CATTLE NEED: GOOD HEALTH CARE

People who manage herds of beef cattle should inspect the animals routinely, looking for signs of health and signs of distress. They should also inspect the facilities, looking for potential hazards. Restraining devices should be available for animals that are receiving treatment.

The manager of a beef cattle operation should consult with a veterinarian to develop programs for vaccinating the animals and maintaining their health.

WHAT BEEF CATTLE NEED: CARE TO PREVENT AND DETECT DISEASES

If cattle are provided with clean and safe housing or shelters, a good quality pasture, nutritious food and fresh air, they will have fewer health problems. However, cattle should be monitored daily for signs of physical or behavioural changes.

Cattle need a regular program of health care. Some visible signs of illness to watch for in beef cattle include:

- Leaves some feed or quits eating entirely
- Weakness or change in posture or movement
- Dull eyes, not alert; droopy ears
- Diarrhea
- Runny or dry nose
- Cough
- Higher than normal body temperature
- Swollen or puffy left side due to bloating
- Limping
- Unusual skin conditions.

Beef cattle need people who recognize signs of good health and who detect health problems early by watching for signs of disease.
Reportable diseases for cattle include:

- Foot-and-Mouth Disease
- Vesicular Stomatitis
- Rinderpest
- Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia
- Lumpy Skin Disease
- Rift Valley Fever
- Bluetongue
- Anthrax
- Pseudorabies
- Rabies
- Anaplasmosis
- Bovine Brucellosis (Bangs Disease)
- Bovine Tuberculosis
- Cysticercosis
- Mange
- Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)

Distressed cattle should be dealt with humanely, effectively, and promptly to prevent avoidable suffering. Abnormal health conditions must receive proper treatment. Sick, injured, or disabled cattle in severe distress should not be subjected to the rigors of loading and transportation. These animals should be euthanized or slaughtered on the farm. Under no circumstances should sick, injured, or disabled animals be transported either to livestock auction markets or long distances to meat packers.

Slaughter at local abattoirs is an alternative if the animals are free of residues and have salvageable meat value.

Suspicion of a reportable disease as defined by the Health of Animals Act must be immediately brought to the notice of a veterinarian.

What does the Code of Practice say about disease?

An important skill of cattlemen is the ability to recognize early signs of distress or disease in animals so that the cause can be identified and prompt, appropriate remedial action taken.

The manager of a beef cattle operation should develop, in consultation with a veterinarian, sound vaccination and sanitation programs appropriate to the facilities and to the management system involved. Increased cattle population density in general requires greater attention to disease prevention.

From Canadian Cattle Identification Agency website at www.canadaid.com/about_us/about_us.html

The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle will be updated and completed by the summer of 2013. Information on the progress of this new Code can be found on the National Farm Animal Care Council website at www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle.

Priorities for the updated Code include dealing with respiratory disease, lameness and nutritional diseases.

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The process for the development of updated Codes can be accessed through the National Farm Animal Care Council at www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice.