

Taking the Vital Signs of a Goat – Colleen Parsons

(Note: it’s highly recommend that goat producers practice taking vital signs on healthy goats, well in advance of when they *need* to use these skills in an emergency situation. Consider having an experienced producer or your veterinarian help you assess your first goat or two.)

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Capturing the goat in as quiet a way as possible is important. A frightened animal or one who has been running will register much higher vital signs than one that is calm.

Secure the goat to a fixed object (wall or fence) using a collar and lead rope, in a corner if possible. Calm the goat by using slow but deliberate movement. (Many goats seem calmer after having their face or throat “pet”.)

Temperature: Using a digital thermometer, or glass veterinary thermometer with a string tied to the end (loop provided), lubricate the end with petroleum jelly or water based lubricant like K-Y Jelly. Straddle the goat, if possible, so that you are looking at his hindquarters. Lift his tail and insert the thermometer into his rectum. Press the “record” button on a digital thermometer or time two minutes with a veterinary thermometer. Remove thermometer and read the results. Normal is 101.5 to 103.5°F – and higher during hot weather. Note that a low or very high body temperature indicates that the goat is in a life threatening situation and needs immediate intervention.

This all sounds easier than it is. There are two glands near the rectum that can mislead you in adverse conditions. If the thermometer doesn’t slide in well and easily, you are in the wrong place. Also, in does or doelings, it is easy to slip the thermometer into the vagina (oops! wrong orifice!), especially if the goat is being uncooperative or your vision is obstructed. Double-check where you have inserted the thermometer. Even the most experienced producers have goofed.

Respirations: With the goat as calm as possible, placing a hand on its side if necessary, count each inhalation, or expansion of the chest wall. Normal is about 12-24 breaths per minute. Notice the quality of the respirations.

Heart Rate: Use a stethoscope or your hand, placing it on the left side of the chest wall until you hear or feel the heartbeats. Count them for one full minute. (There are usually two different sounds when using the stethoscope, count the louder first sound only.) Normal is 70-80 beats per minute.

Rumen sounds: keep your hand over the rumen (the area on the left side of the goat near the spinal column between the ribs and the hip) for one full minute. A churning or rumbling should be felt once or twice.