

Guide to Accessing Livestock Veterinary Medicine in Nova Scotia

Introduction

Veterinary services for livestock are crucial for animal health and welfare, food safety, production and public health. Animal health and welfare is a key driver of success for agricultural businesses. In NS, veterinary services for livestock species is provided by private veterinarians situated throughout the province. Veterinarians balance legislative requirements, professional ethics and well-being of their veterinary teams with patient needs and client expectations. Currently, there are challenges with accessing veterinary services in rural and remote areas made worse by the ongoing veterinary shortage across the country. There are steps animal owners can take to improve access to veterinary services. Being prepared, planning ahead and building a relationship with your veterinarian can prevent emergencies and increase options for care when issues arise. Animal health knowledge is crucial for livestock owners wanting to access veterinary care as it improves:

- Recognition of health issues
- Preventative management
- Communication and decision making
- Appropriate treatment practices and compliance with protocols
- Animal and human health
- Economic returns

There are resources available for animal owners to learn more about their livestock (some are listed in appendix 5). You can also ask your veterinarian or NSDA Agricultural Representative for resources. Animal owners are strongly encouraged to learn good animal husbandry skills from reputable sources prior to acquiring animals and throughout their animal partnership career.

Locating a veterinarian

Veterinarians working in NS are licenced by the Nova Scotia Veterinary Medical Association (NSVMA). Livestock owners can use the NSVMA “Find a Clinic” tool to locate services <https://nsvma.ca/find-a-clinic/> Look specifically for clinics listed as Large Animal Clinics or Hospitals.

Some clinics also participate in the **Livestock Health Services Program**, which offers call-fee and mileage subsidies for livestock producers registered under the Nova Scotia Farm Registration Program. Farms eligible to file a farm tax return with the Canada Revenue Agency may register.

More information can be found at: <https://novascotia.ca/sns/paal/agric/paal005.asp>

Livestock producers are also encouraged to register with the NS Premises ID Program. This program links animals to geographic locations for the purposes of responding to emergencies and diseases that threaten animal or human health.

[Nova Scotia Premises Identification \(PID\) Program - FAQ | novascotia.ca](#)

Establishing a Veterinary–Client–Patient Relationship (VCPR)

A VCPR is a professional relationship between the veterinarian, client, and patient (the animal(s)) and is essential for effective veterinary care. It formally establishes the veterinarian as part of the farm management team and allows them to make decisions that are in the best interest of the animals and the client. A VCPR is **legally required** for a veterinarian to be able to prescribe antimicrobials and for clients to be able to purchase prescription drugs. It outlines responsibilities for both the veterinary team and the client.

It is recommended that a VCPR be established in advance as this may allow for the remote provision of some services. In exceptional circumstances a VCPR can be established through remote means alone when an in-person visit is not possible. However, for groups of animals (herds, flocks) the VCPR must be established in -person.

The use of a **Farm Enrollment Form** (appendix 1) may assist with farm information collection.

Essential Components of a VCPR

- The veterinarian assumes responsibility for making clinical judgments regarding the health of the animal(s) and the need for medical treatment. The veterinarian provides oversight of treatment, compliance, and outcome.
- The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the health status of the animals on which to base their assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. This occurs through recent examination, medically appropriate farm visits or communication with the client once a valid VCPR has been established.
- The client agrees to follow veterinary instructions regarding the medical or other treatment of the animal or group of animals.
- The veterinarian is available, or has arranged coverage, for follow-up evaluation, especially in cases of adverse reactions or treatment failure.

Prevention

Good preventative medicine lowers emergency veterinary costs, improves animal health and well being, and improves farm productivity. Your veterinarian can help you develop a preventative plan for your farm.

Essential Components of a Preventative Plan

1. Practice Good Biosecurity

- Limit visitor access to livestock areas
- Quarantine new or returning animals (14–30 days)
- Maintain clean equipment and footwear
- Avoid unnecessary mixing of age groups
- Reduce wildlife exposure when possible

2. Provide Proper Nutrition

- Quality feedstuffs
- Access to clean water
- Scientific input on diet composition (reputable sources or professional advice)

3. Maintain Proper Housing and Environment

- Dry, clean bedding
- Adequate ventilation
- Safe, functional handling facilities

4. Monitor Animals Daily

- Appetite and rumination
- Behaviour changes
- Manure consistency
- Mobility and lameness
- Udder health
- Breathing patterns

5. Follow a Herd Health Program including:

- Record keeping and performance monitoring
- Vaccination protocol
- Parasite control plan
- Management plans (ex. calving/lambing/kidding, preconditioning, mastitis control)
- Nutrition programs

When to seek veterinary care

Routine or Preventative Veterinary Care offers many benefits including disease prevention, early detection of disease or poor health, improved animal health and welfare, and improved public health and food safety. Investing in preventative care reduces costs resulting in improved productivity and profitability. Working with a veterinarian to ensure routine and preventive care reduces the need for urgent or emergency care.

Examples:

- Vaccination schedules
- Parasite control planning
- Nutrition and herd-health assessments
- Reproductive management (pregnancy checks, bull/ram fertility testing)
- Housing, welfare, and facility improvement consultations

Urgent Veterinary Care addresses issues that require prompt medical care but are not life threatening. Seek care within 12-48 hours. **An established VCPR will facilitate access to urgent care.** This type of service may be provided remotely, on site or at a veterinary clinic dependent on many factors.

Examples:

- Fever or lethargy lasting more than 24 hours
- Respiratory issues (coughing, nasal discharge)
- Mastitis or udder health issues
- Lameness not improving promptly
- Diarrhea in young animals

Emergency Care is required in critical or life-threatening situations. Discuss your emergency plan with your veterinarian in advance so you know how to access emergency care when needed. In case of an emergency, call your veterinarian as early as possible to allow time for response.

Examples:

- Sudden, severe, or unexplained illness or death
- Difficult births (dystocia)
- Severe pain or inability to rise
- Bloat or signs of digestive emergencies
- Neurologic signs (circling, seizures)
- Suspected contagious or reportable disease
- Severe bleeding

Preparing for a veterinary visit

Proper preparation makes visits faster, cheaper, and safer. It also improves diagnosis and treatment success. Knowing when your veterinarian is in your area, arranging predictable scheduled visits and coordinating visits with neighbors also improve service delivery. The **Farm Veterinary Visit Checklist** (appendix 2) and **The Clinical Exam Checklist** (appendix 3) can be used to prepare for the visit.

Essential Components of Visit Preparation

1. Animal and Health Records

- List of animals to be seen including:
 - Signalment (ID, age, breed, sex, stage of production)
 - Health records
 - Production records
- Symptoms and when they started
 - Photos and videos may be helpful
- Feed and ration details
- Management / Day to Day Routine details
- Lab or diagnostic reports
- Previous treatments given (dose, date, effect)

2. Prepare the Animal(s) and facilities

- Ensure animals are caught and in a safe, accessible handling area
- Ensure facilities (chute, headgate, pen) are ready
- Have halters, ropes, or panels prepared as needed
- Ensure adequate lighting, power supply and shelter
- Have clean water available
- Have competent, knowledgeable helpers present
- Have medication available

During a veterinary visit

Make the most of the time with your veterinarian on the farm. Be sure to ask questions about prevention and treatment options. Take notes and ensure you have clear instructions about any prevention or treatment plans. This may include dosing directions and withdrawal times if medication is prescribed. Determine a follow-up plan if required.

After a veterinary visit

After the visit ensure that all prevention or treatment plans are recorded. Follow instructions as provided and monitor the animals for progress or complications. Seek follow up care or advice if required.

Telemedicine

Telemedicine is the delivery of veterinary medical advice and treatment through telecommunication. It complements, rather than replaces, traditional veterinary in-person care and **requires an active VCPR.**

Benefits:

- Improve access to professional service especially in remote areas
- Efficient medical evaluation and management
- Appropriate access to medications
- Convenience
- Cost

Risks:

- Insufficient information to allow for appropriate or accurate medical decisions
- Delays in medical evaluation and treatment
- Adverse drug reactions or allergic reactions

Telemedicine may not be suitable for all situations. It is the veterinarian's responsibility to determine when the use of telemedicine is appropriate. Telemedicine can be used for:

- Remote diagnosis and treatment of some conditions
- Some preventative care
- Follow up care
- Prescription refills

If you wish to access telemedicine services speak to your veterinarian in advance. Informed consent for the use of telemedicine, services provided and fees charged is required, (see example in appendix 4). It is beneficial to have this in place before service is needed. When a telemedicine call is sought, providing thorough information will enable effective and efficient telemedicine service. The **Clinical Exam Checklist** (appendix 3) can be used to prepare for the visit.

Appendix 1: Farm Enrolment Form

Farm Details: completed by owner or veterinary team

Farm Name	
Farmer's Name(s)	
Address	
Phone #	
Email	
Preferred contact method	
Emergency Contact Name	
Emergency Contact Phone #	
Farm Registration Number (if applicable)	

Animal Details: completed by owner or veterinary team

Animal Type	Purpose	Breed	Total Number of Animals	Comments
Cattle <input type="checkbox"/>	Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Dairy <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		Females: Males: Offspring:	
Sheep <input type="checkbox"/>	Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Dairy <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		Females: Males: Offspring:	
Goats <input type="checkbox"/>	Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Dairy <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		Females: Males: Offspring:	
Poultry <input type="checkbox"/>	Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Layer <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		Females: Males: Offspring:	
Swine <input type="checkbox"/>	Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		Females: Males: Offspring:	
Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Dairy <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		Females: Males: Offspring:	

Housing: completed by veterinary team

Housing Type		Condition	Description
Barn		Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe <input type="checkbox"/>	
Pasture		Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe <input type="checkbox"/>	

Animal Nutrition: completed by veterinary team

Feed type	Source/Quality	Comments
Forage: Hay <input type="checkbox"/> Silage <input type="checkbox"/> Pasture <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/>	
Grain: Grain <input type="checkbox"/> Specify: Commercial ration <input type="checkbox"/> Specify: Other <input type="checkbox"/> Specify:		
Water Source	Well <input type="checkbox"/> Pond <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	
Water Test Results Available	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Any water quality issues?
Body Score of Livestock (1 underfed, 5 overweight)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/>	

Animal Health and Biosecurity: completed by veterinary team

Measure		Comments
Access management	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Dedicated clothing/footwear	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Species separation	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
New/sick animal isolation	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Waste management	Details:	
Facility management/cleaning	Details:	
Pest Control	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Vaccinations	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Parasite Control	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Diseases present on farm	Specify:	
Diagnostic information on file	Specify:	
Medications on Hand at Farm	List:	
Medications Commonly Used	List:	Reason /dosage etc. Attach treatment protocols

Animal Care knowledge: completed by veterinary team

Animal restraint	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Temperature	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Evaluate Appetite and Feed Intake:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Respiratory evaluation: rate/ effort/cough/ excretions	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Fecal evaluation: consistency/ amount/color	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Evaluate Gait and posture	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Mammary evaluation: heat / swelling /California Mastitis test/ milk sample collection	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Intravenous administration of medication/blood collection	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Injectable administration of medication	Intramuscular <input type="checkbox"/> Subcutaneous <input type="checkbox"/>	
Intramammary administration of medication	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Topical administration of medication	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Oral administration of medication	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Oral tubing – esophageal feeder/tube	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

Specific farm notes: completed by owner or veterinary team

Please include a map of the farm premise. Mapping tools can be found at:

<https://animalhealthcanada.ca/farm-site-mapping>

Appendix 2: Veterinary visit checklist

Farm Veterinary Visit Checklist

Purpose:

Use this checklist to prepare for routine herd/flock health visits, emergency calls, or telemedicine consultations. Good preparation saves time, reduces stress, and helps your veterinarian provide the best care.

1. Before the Visit — Preparation

- Farm registration number (under the Farm Registration Act)
- Owner/manager name and contact info
- Physical address and clear directions (GPS pin, civic number, landmarks)
- Emergency contact number (in case the vet is delayed or needs to reach you)
- Date and time confirmed with veterinary clinic
- Purpose of visit (routine herd check, vaccination, pregnancy check, emergency, etc.)
- Estimated number of animals to be examined or treated
- Program enrollment details (e.g., Cattle Herd Health Assistance, Sheep Herd Health Program, etc.)

2. Animal and Health Records

- List of animals or groups to be seen (ID tags, pen numbers, or names)
- Age, breed, sex, and production stage for each group
- Description of problems observed (signs, duration, treatments tried)
- Vaccination and deworming records (dates, products used, doses)
- Breeding and reproductive records (AI dates, pregnancy checks, calving/lambing history)
- Feed and ration details (current mix, recent changes)
- Mortality log (recent losses and suspected causes)
- Lab or diagnostic reports, if available

3. Facilities and Animal Handling

- Working chute or head gate ready and safe
- Adequate lighting and shelter from weather
- Power supply available (if needed for equipment)
- Animals caught or confined before vet arrives
- Safe, calm helpers assigned
- Clean, dry area for examination
- Bucket of clean water and disinfectant available
- Pets and bystanders kept clear of the work area

4. Biosecurity

- Clean boots, coveralls, and gloves ready for use
- Disinfectant footbath or boot dip set up
- Isolation area identified for sick or new animals
- Visitors' log updated
- Waste (needles, bottles, gloves) disposal plan in place

5. During the Visit

- Review today's priorities and herd goals with vet
- Confirm any samples to be collected (blood, fecal, milk, tissue)
- Ask questions about herd performance, nutrition, or reproduction
- Review vaccination or parasite control plans
- Note recommended management changes

6. After the Visit

- Record all treatments, doses, and withdrawal times
- File or scan vet's visit report and invoices
- Add follow-up tasks to your calendar (rechecks, booster shots, testing dates)
- Schedule next herd health or follow-up visit
- Share findings with farm staff or family members

Appendix 3: Clinical Exam Checklist

Clinical Exam Checklist

Patient Info & History

Patient Information	History
Owner/Farm: _____	Presenting Complaint: _____
Species: _____	Duration: _____
Breed: _____	Recent Treatments: _____
Age: _____	Feeding/Housing: _____
Sex: _____	Vaccination Status: _____
Weight: _____	Date: _____
ID/Tag #: _____	

General Observation & Physical Exam

General Observation

BCS (/5 or /9): _____

Attitude: _____

Gait: Normal Abnormal

Temperature (°C): _____

Resp Rate: _____

MM (Color/Moisture): _____

Physical Exam – Checklist

Skin: Normal coat Lesions/wounds Lumps Hair loss
 Other/Details: _____

Eyes: Normal Discharge Swelling Eyelid lesion
 Other/Details: _____

Mouth/Teeth/Gums: Normal Broken/missing teeth Ulcers/growths
Other/Details: _____

Respiratory: Normal Clear lungs Discharge Coughing Breathing difficulty
Other/Details: _____

Cardiovascular: Normal HR Regular rhythm CRT <2s Strong pulses Other/Details: _____

GI: Rumen motility Normal feces Bloating
 Other/Details: _____

MSK: Lameness Joint swelling/pain
 Other/Details: _____

Neuro: Alert Normal posture/reflexes Circling Head tilt
 Other/Details: _____

Udder/Repro: Discharge Mastitis Abnormal testicle Pregnancy/Estrus signs
Other/Details: _____

Diagnostics & Assessment/Treatment

Diagnostics

Fecal

Bloodwork

Ultrasound

Other: _____

Assessment & Treatment

Diagnosis: _____

Medications: _____

Withholding time explained: Yes No

Recommendations: _____

Appendix 4: Sample consent form for telemedicine consultation

Consent for Telemedicine Consultation

I hereby consent to veterinary telemedicine services for my animals. I understand that telemedicine involves remote communication (video, phone, or electronic messaging) with the veterinarian for consultation, diagnosis, and treatment recommendations.

Acknowledgments:

- **I understand that telemedicine has limitations compared to in-person examinations.**
- **I agree to provide accurate and complete information about the animal(s) and environment.**
- **I acknowledge that the veterinarian may recommend an in-person visit if deemed necessary.**
- **I understand that treatment decisions and prescriptions will comply with applicable food safety and regulatory standards.**
- **I accept responsibility for monitoring the animals' response to treatment and reporting concerns promptly.**

Confidentiality:

My information and the details of my animals will be kept confidential in accordance with professional standards.

Consent:

By signing below, I consent to the use of telemedicine services for my animals, understand the above conditions and agree to pay associated fees.

Owner Signature:

Appendix 5: Producer Resources:

All species:

- [Codes of Practice for the care and handling of farm animals](#)
- [Nova Scotia New Farmer – New Farmers Discover it here](#)
- **Perennia Food and Agriculture Corporation**
<https://www.perennia.ca/agriculture/commodity-information/>
- Farmed Animal Antimicrobial Stewardship <https://www.amstewardship.ca/>
- THINKFARM <https://novascotia.ca/thinkfarm/>
- Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture <https://nsfa-fane.ca/>

Small Ruminants: (sheep and goats)

- Canadian Sheep Federation <https://www.cansheep.ca/>
- Canadian National Goat Federation <http://cangoats.com/>
- Canadian Meat Goat Association <https://canadianmeatgoat.com/>
- Sheep Producers Association of Nova Scotia <https://nsssheep.ca/>
- Handbook for the Control of Internal Parasites of Sheep and Goats
- [Parasites | Ontario Sheep Farmers](#)
- [Intro To Small Ruminant Course \(ISRP\)](#)
- Nova Scotia Sheep Manual <https://novascotia.ca/thinkfarm/documents/Manual-Sheep.pdf>
- Nova Scotia Goat Manual <https://novascotia.ca/thinkfarm/documents/Manual-Goat.pdf>

Beef Resources:

- Beef Cattle Research Council [Home - BeefResearch.ca](#)
- Canadian Cattle Association <https://www.cattle.ca/>
- Verified Beef <https://verifiedbeef.ca/>
- Nova Scotia Cattle Producers <https://nscattle.ca/>
- Nova Scotia Beef Manual <https://novascotia.ca/thinkfarm/documents/Manual-Beef.pdf>

Swine resources:

- Canadian Pork Council <https://www.cpc-ccp.com/>
- Pork Nova Scotia <https://porknovascotia.ca/>
- Canadian Small Scale Pig Farming Manual [Small Scale Pig Farming](#)
- Small Scale Pig Farming Website [Small Scale Pig Farming - Small Scale Pig Farming](#)

Dairy Resources:

- Dairy Farmers of Canada <https://dairyfarmersofcanada.ca/en>
- Dairy Farmers of Nova Scotia <https://www.dfns.ca/>
- Nova Scotia Dairy Manual <https://novascotia.ca/thinkfarm/documents/Manual-Dairy.pdf>
- Nova Scotia Small Scale Dairy Guide <https://novascotia.ca/thinkfarm/documents/getting-started-in-small-scale-dairy-production.pdf>
- Dairyland Initiative
- Cornell
- Penn State
- Ontario

Bee resources:

- Canadian Honey Council <https://honeycouncil.ca/>
- Nova Scotia Beekeepers' Association <https://nsbeekeepers.ca/>
- Canadian Homey Council Online Training for Apiary Workers <https://chclearning.ca/online-training-for-apiary-workers/>
- [Fundamentals of Beekeeping | Dalhousie University](#)
- Honey Bee Research Centre <https://hbrc.ca/resources-for-beekeepers/>

Poultry Resources:

- Chicken Farmers of Canada <https://www.chickenfarmers.ca/>
- Chicken Farmers of Nova Scotia <https://nschicken.com/>
- Turkey Farmers of Canada <https://www.turkeyfarmersofcanada.ca/>
- Turkey Farmers of Nova Scotia <https://www.turkeyfarmersofnovascotia.com/>
- Egg Farmers of Canada <https://www.eggfarmers.ca/>
- Egg Farmers of Nova Scotia <https://nsegg.ca/>
- Canadian Hatching Egg Producers <http://chep-poic.ca/>
- NS Small Flock Poultry <https://novascotia.ca/thinkfarm/documents/SmallFlockPoultry.pdf>
- Small Flock Poultry Health <https://cahss.ca/cahss-tools/document-library/Small-Flock-Poultry-Health-1>