Rabies is probably the most common zoonotic disease that people know. The incidence of rabies in North America is low, but this disease is still found worldwide. Rabies is caused by the rabies virus which attacks the central nervous system and ultimately leads to death. Wild carnivores and bats are the most common sources of human infections, but any mammal can get rabies. There were 29 reported equine cases in the United States in 2013. In New York state, there were 335 reported cases of rabies in wild and domestic animals that same year with 5,398 reported cases throughout the U.S. Rabies is usually passed by a bite from an infected animal, but can enter the body through mucous membranes such as the mouth or eyes when contacted by infected saliva. Horses are at risk of being bitten by wild animals living near their pastures and are usually bitten on the muzzle, face, and lower limbs.

Rabies brings to mind images of foaming at the mouth and aggression which can occur in the “furious” form. However, in horses the “dumb” or “paralytic” form is more common. As this form progresses, horses have difficulty swallowing and caretakers are put at risk when they go to look in the mouth or give oral medication with bare hands. Rabies can also present in some unusual ways including as colic or lameness and can make early stages of the disease difficult to diagnose. In horses, the virus can be present in the body for 2 to 9 weeks before signs develop. Once signs develop, rabies is always fatal and progresses quickly over a 2 to 10 day period. Fortunately, modern vaccines are almost 100% effective at preventing this deadly disease.

The Many Faces of Rabies - <http://www.aaep.org/info/horse-health?publication=948>

Wondering about Rabies titers? <http://gvequine.com/Pages/articles14.php>