



A Guide to Health Problems of SHEEP & GOATS

Sheep and goats make wonderful pets on a lifestyle block but need routine health care to keep them in good condition.

SHEEP & GOAT HEALTH PROBLEMS

Here are some of the most common health problems in sheep and goats:

GASTROINTESTINAL PARASITES

Worms like *Haemonchus* (Barber's Pole Worm), *Ostertagia* and *Trichostrongylus* are common causes of disease in sheep and goats.

The worms compete for nutrition with their host and can cause weight loss, scouring and dehydration.



Haemonchus
(Barber's Pole Worm)

Barber's Pole worm can also cause severe anaemia as it sucks the animal's blood.

This can present as weakness, pale gums and sclera, and sudden death.



Pale sclera in a sheep with Haemonchus

Treatment is based around an effective broad spectrum drench as well as symptomatic treatment like fluid therapy and in severe cases a blood transfusion.

Prevention is based on regular drenching and faecal egg counts (FEC), especially of young animals, and good grazing management techniques such as:

- cross-grazing different species like sheep with cattle and horses
- quarantine-drenching stock on arrival and testing for worm eggs 10 days later before releasing them onto the farm
- accurate dosing according to weight – under-dosing encourages resistance, overdosing can cause drench toxicity especially in goats.

FACIAL ECZEMA

Facial Eczema (FE) is a disease caused by a toxin called sporidesmin, produced by a fungus in ryegrass pastures. It thrives in moist, warm and humid conditions and is often a problem in summer and autumn.

When ingested, the toxin damages the liver, causing a build-up of other toxins like chlorophyll in the body. Chlorophyll reacts with UV light in

the skin and causes the sunburn-like signs often seen in unprotected sheep.

Sub-clinical signs include weight loss and difficulties getting pregnant for ewes.

Clinical disease presents as shade-seeking,



A Sheep with Facial Eczema



Facial Eczema spores as seen under a microscope

droopy, red and swollen ears, redness and skin peeling, kicking at flanks, loss of appetite and potentially death in severe cases.

It is an extremely painful condition and affected animals need to be seen by the vet, to provide treatment or even euthanasia for severely affected animals. The liver damage is often irreversible, but supportive treatment can include pain relief, antihistamines and vitamins. Providing shade and moving animals to a different pasture (hay or long grass) is essential to stop progression of the disease.

Prevention starts with monitoring of pasture spore counts to indicate when FE season is likely to start. This information is available at the vet clinic and spore counts can be carried out on your own property as well. The best protection for your sheep is provided by slow release zinc boluses. This will protect your lambs and sheep for six weeks after which another bolus can be given if spore counts are still high.

FE is less of a problem in goats as they are browsers and don't ingest the same quantities of affected ryegrass as sheep do.

CLOSTRIDIAL DISEASES

Clostridial bacteria are the cause of a group of deadly diseases in sheep and goats. These include Tetanus, Blackleg, Pulpy Kidney/enterotoxaemia, Gas Gangrene, Black Disease and Sudden Death Syndrome. The bacteria live in the ground and can enter the animal through a wound, causing a sudden rapidly deteriorating condition with high mortality rates. They are usually not curable once the disease has taken hold of your animal, therefore prevention is essential.

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A vaccine can be given to protect lambs and kids from as young as 6 weeks old. A booster shot is needed 4 weeks later followed by annual boosters. Pregnant ewes and does should be vaccinated 4 weeks before birth, so they produce enough maternal antibodies in the colostrum to protect offspring from the diseases until they are old enough to receive their first vaccination.

FOOTROT

Footrot occurs when continuous exposure to wet and muddy pastures/yards causes damage to interdigital skin. This allows the soil bacteria *Fusobacterium necrophorum* to enter the damaged soft tissue of the foot and cause lameness, swelling and the characteristic smell of dead tissue. In severe cases the entire hoof can be under-run and may need removing.



Footrot in a sheep's foot

Goats are particularly susceptible and can often be affected in all four feet. Treatment includes moving animals to dry ground and using antibiotic/antiseptic foot-sprays or foot-baths. Severely affected animals will benefit from veterinary attention to trim the hoof properly, provide antibiotics and pain relief.

Preventative measures can be taken to reduce the risk of footrot occurring in your livestock:

- provide access to dry areas like yards or concrete pads so animals can get out of the wet paddocks
- foot bathe regularly with dilute zinc, formalin or copper (for dosages contact the vet)
- regular foot trimming.

FLYSTIKE

In the warmer months of November to March our farm animals are at risk of getting flystruck with blowfly maggots.

Flies are often attracted by urine or faecal staining around the crutch, footrot, fleecerot and skin infections and wounds.

Affected animals will show irritation by feet stomping, tail twitching and rubbing, then become depressed and inappetant. On closer inspection raw oozing skin and large numbers of maggots will be seen in the fleece.

Treatment with flystrike powders or dressings, antibiotic, pain relief and manually removing maggots from the wounds is needed.

As always, prevention is better than cure, and amongst other things like regular crutching and foot trimming, a flystrike spray like Zenith or Cyrex can be used on sheep.

TOXICITIES

Ensure sheep or goats have no access to rhododendrons, azalea and oleander, trees such as yew and ngaio, plants such as foxglove and lilies, and weeds such as ragwort and nightshades. It is important to become familiar with all plants that may pose a risk,

and the list is extensive. If in doubt, please consult your veterinarian.