



Ryegrass Staggers



Ryegrass staggers is a condition caused by the endophyte fungus *Acremonium lolii* which is found in the leaf sheath of perennial ryegrass pastures. The endophyte was introduced into the ryegrass seeds to deter insect attacks and increase grass growth rates. This fungus produces several mycotoxins including Lolitrem-B, which, when ingested, causes neurological signs in Alpacas and other grazing species.

This disease usually occurs in mid/late summer and autumn or similar weather conditions, especially after a drought when new grass is growing fast with rainy weather.

Young growing animals appear to be most prone to ryegrass staggers.

Use the following 6 point check list to check your Alpacas every day. In animals affected with ryegrass staggers you may notice:

A = Appearance – Mild head tremors initially, often appear normal until they are excited or agitated. Signs progress to head shaking, wobbliness and recumbency.

L = Locomotion – A high stepping gait may develop and stiffness that can lead to wobbliness (ataxia) when attempting to walk occurs. This can lead to complete loss of limb control and recumbency. In severe cases paddling of the limbs and a star-gazing expression in the neck can be mistaken for tetanus.

P = Poo – may be normal or abnormal.

A = Appetite – Appetite is decreased as animals are very lethargic.

C = Condition – Animals may or may not show weight loss.

A = Attitude - Affected animals are depressed and react to stimuli by showing nervous signs.



It is important to avoid stressing affected animals as sudden movement and loud noises can cause nervous signs to get worse. Remove affected animals from the affected pasture straight away and feed hay from a known non-endophyte source like Lucerne hay as well as pellets and other feeds.

Once removed from the pasture containing the toxins most animals will recover with no apparent residual effects. Recovery times vary but are usually between one to three weeks.

There are natural products like “Mycosorb” available that may help in recovery but there is no data at present to support these.

For prevention, there are endophyte free ryegrass seeds available or animals could be grazed on completely ryegrass free pasture.

For any questions or concerns on this or other health issues in your Alpacas, please call us at Levin & Horowhenua Vets 06 368 2891.