

Lambing

Information Sheet

Coccidiosis in lambs



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Coccidiosis is a common cause of scour in four to eight week old lambs. The disease is caused by a tiny parasite that lives in the intestines and damages the gut lining. The infectious eggs, (oocysts), are passed in dung and swallowed when lambs suck dirty teats or eat contaminated bedding, grass, feed or water. Disease risk increases in overstocked, unhygienic conditions. Infected lambs have poor appetites and look tucked up with dirty tails. Badly scoured lambs can die and some may strain and pass blood. All will lose condition and be slow to finish.

Around lambing time ewes pass small numbers of oocysts in their dung which will infect the earliest born lambs. They in turn produce huge numbers of oocysts so that later born lambs are exposed to dangerous levels of infection in the environment and become ill. Coccidiosis is often seen in indoor, early lambing systems but can also be a problem outdoors where cold, wet weather can trigger disease outbreaks. In these conditions lambs will congregate in sheltered areas which can become heavily contaminated with oocysts.

Prevention of coccidiosis is based on reducing the numbers of oocysts in the environment.

- When buildings are empty either steam clean or use disinfectants capable of killing coccidial oocysts. (e.g. Kilcox Extra, Kilco Ltd.).
- Compost bedding/manure before spreading.
- Don't over stock buildings or fields.
- Avoid stocking lambs/calves in pens/fields already used by earlier born lambs/calves.
- Remove scouring lambs/calves from the group.
- A good intake of colostrum will help protect lambs/calves against all bugs that cause scour.
- Clipping tails or dagging will help keep teats and udders clean.
- Use plenty of clean dry bedding, fix leaking troughs/gutters and make sure drainage is adequate.
- Regularly change the position of shelters and troughs in fields.
- Site water and feed troughs to reduce the chances of animals dunging in them.
- Some oocysts will survive from year to the next so avoid grazing young animals on fields where there was a problem the previous year.
- Supplying feed or buckets medicated with decoquinate, (Deccox, Apharma) to ewes and/or lambs will help reduce the oocyst build up. A veterinary feed prescription is required for these.

If you suspect coccidiosis you should speak to your vet for advice on diagnosis and treatment. Dung samples can provide for confirmation that coccidiosis is the cause of the scour. Lambs of this age can also scour due to infection with the worm *Nematodirus*. This can occur on its own or at the same time as coccidiosis. If lambs are dying post-mortem examinations are useful to distinguish the two. An accurate diagnosis is important as the treatments are completely different. Two drenches, Vecoxan, (Janssen), and Baycox, (Bayer), plus an injection, Intradine, (Norbrook), are currently licensed for the treatment of coccidiosis which should be carried out on a group basis. The drenches can also be used to prevent disease by routinely dosing lambs, before disease outbreaks are expected, at around four to six weeks of age.

Visit www.fas.scot for further information or contact the helpline on 0300 323 0161, or by email at advice@fas.scot