

SHEEP LAMENESS BY KATE FARMAN

At this time of what has been a very wet year, UK sheep flocks may be battling a frustrating issue - lameness.

Lameness is not only a significant welfare issue, it also is estimated to cost the UK sheep industry £28 million per year and contributes nearly 70% of the annual use of antibiotics in sheep.

Most commonly, lameness within our flocks is caused by 3 main diseases:



SCALD

Scald is the most common cause of temporary lameness in sheep and occurs in wet footing, such as damp spring grass or soiled straw housing. The skin between the toes is weakened and becomes red, swollen and the skin will begin to slough. Most animals will recover fully from scald if treated promptly.

FOOTROT

Often secondary to scald or damage to the skin between the toes, footrot occurs when bacteria (specifically Dichelobacter Nodosus) penetrate the foot. D.Nodus survives in the soil and can be spread between members of the flock. This transmission is most common in high traffic and poached areas, such as through gateways or around feeders & troughs. Footrot is extremely painful, and animals will often be non-weight bearing on the affected leg with thick, foul-smelling discharge from the infected site. Left untreated footrot can under-run the hoof capsule and cause permanent damage to the underlying tissues.

CODD (CONTAGIOUS OVINE DIGITAL DERMATITIS)

CODD is a contagious disease caused by Treponeme bacteria. The infection begins at the coronary band (where the haired skin meets the hoof capsule), often seen as a small red ulcer. Untreated, the infection then tracks underneath the hoof capsule from top to bottom and can cause the hoof capsule to detach. Some flocks are clear of CODD, and not all animals will be lame in the first stages of infection, so it is really important to have an established quarantine protocol for bought in animals to avoid introducing the bacteria to your flock.

Tempting as it may be, it is important not to trim hooves which may be affected by footrot or CODD - nicking the sensitive tissues can spread the infection further and hoof cutters can spread the bacteria between feet and animals.



Kate Farman BVSc MRCVS

CONTROLLING LAMENESS WITHIN YOUR FLOCK

Prevention is better than cure when it comes to managing flock lameness.

The below 5-point plan is the most effective plan for long term management of sheep lameness.

TREAT: Prompt treatment of lame sheep is pertinent to good recovery rates and to reduce spreading.

Catch: promptly identify lame animals, ideally within 3 days of going lame.

Inspect: look at the foot and investigate the cause of lameness. Do not trim.

Diagnose: establish likely diagnosis based on findings. If in doubt - give us a phone.

Treat: prompt treatment with antibiotics and antiinflammatories where needed: the correct treatment, the correct dose & the correct course is crucial.

For scald, most cases respond well to treatment with a topical spray containing oxytetracycline. For footrot and CODD, injectable long acting oxytetracycline antibiotics and an anti-inflammatory are indicated. For severe cases or those not responding to treatment, second line antibiotics may be required. If in doubt, give us a call.

Mark: Identify the animal and the affected leg to help monitor recovery or recurrence.

CULL: Chronically lame animals or recurring cases will spread infection to the rest of the flock, may have irreversible damage and are a significant welfare concern - they should be culled from the flock where possible. We would recommend a 3-strike policy with lame sheep.

PREVENT EXPOSURE: Most causes of lameness thrive in wet & muddy environments, such as around troughs and handling areas. Regularly moving feed troughs & mineral buckets at pasture and placing handling areas on concrete will decrease risk of spread. Ground can also be treated with hydrated lime in high traffic areas such as gateways.

When used correctly, footbathing can be a useful tool for both prevention and treatment. It is important that you choose the correct chemical for your handling system (standing vs walk-through) and use the chemical at the correct dilution. Animals must be clean, and the bath must be changed regularly. Antibiotic footbaths should never be routinely used without veterinary advice. Discuss with your vet about implementing or changing a footbathing regime.

QUARANTINE: The most common way infection is introduced into a naive flock is through bought in animals. Having an established isolation protocol will reduce this risk. Bought in animals should be footbathed on arrival and kept separate for 28 days before introducing to the rest of the flock. Any lameness issues that arise during isolation should be treated & have recovered before they are let out of isolation. Remember this includes your own infected sheep as well! Separating them from the flock will reduce the risk of spread to other sheep in your flock.

VACCINATE: There is a licenced vaccine for protection against only footrot causing bacteria, and the programme can be altered to suit the farm and to take into account the level of lameness within the flock. Phone us to discuss if you think this may be of benefit to your flock.

If you wish to discuss ways to help manage lameness within your flock, do not hesitate to give us a phone or speak to one of our vets on their next visit.



DAIRY MEETING: Calf Health

Thank you to everyone who joined us for our meeting on calf health, with Sara Robson from MSD Animal Health.

We spoke about best practices for feeding dairy calves from birth to weaning, explored the Bovilis Cryptium vaccine... and got a tour of the new dairy shed at Kirklands!