



## Coccidiosis – are your lambs at risk?

Lambs that are approaching 3 to 4 weeks old may be at risk of coccidiosis infection on your farm. Please read on for more information.

### Coccidiosis facts

Coccidiosis is caused by microscopic, protozoal parasites that infect and multiply within the gut wall. There are many species of coccidia.

- There is **NO** cross infection between cattle and sheep
- Only **TWO** strains are pathogenic and cause disease in lambs
- *Eimeria ovinoidalis* and *Eimeria crandallis* can lead to severe disease including severe gut damage and death in some cases
- A high oocyst FEC does not necessarily indicate disease – speak with your vet to speciate the eggs.
- Immunity develops as they get older, disease occurs when the challenge is **HIGH** before immunity is established.
- At risk animals are lambs aged 3-8 weeks old.
- At risk animals are lambs where immunity is suppressed, not developed, nutrition is poor, other parasites are present (i.e. nematodirus) and weather conditions are wet/muddy/cold

### What does coccidiosis look like?

- Lambs appear 'tucked up' and depressed
- Poor fleece
- Weight loss and poor growth
- Diarrhoea – grey, dark, blood stained
- Straining to pass faeces
- Death following deterioration or sudden death where challenge is high
- Gut damage can affect the lambs for a long time and reduce future growth potential



Pic: Lamb showing clinical signs of coccidiosis (Credit Phillipa Page)

## How does the infection occur?

- Lambs ingest infective “oocysts” in the environment which have been passed in the faeces of already infected animals such as older lambs
- Adult ewes can also act as infected carrier animals.
- Oocysts can develop and survive in housed and indoor environments and on pastures. They may also survive for long periods, including over winter, being very resistant to drying out, freezing, heat and several disinfectants.
- High levels of challenge occur – around wet muddy areas i.e. creep feeders, shelter in fields, in high stocking density sheds where a build up has occurred and in paddocks where many young lambs pass through (i.e. near the buildings).



Credit: Fiona Lovatt Flock Health Ltd

## How to manage coccidiosis

- Lambs need to be infected and EXPOSED to develop immunity, whilst not being affected and succumbing to disease
- Lambs need to be 3 weeks old and have been exposed to infection before treatment.
- Susceptible lambs are lambs that have had limited exposure and are turned onto highly infective pastures.
- HYGIENE is crucial – water troughs, feed troughs, equipment, gates etc need cleaning OFTEN.
- TREATMENT can be problematic and timing is crucial – discuss with your vet for the optimum time to treat.
- Treatments may need repeating if the timing is out OR if the AGE GROUP spread of lambs is wide.

## Treatment

Speak with your vet for advice on speciation to check for pathogenic species and the treatment approach.

- Lambs treated with antiprotazoals shed fewer oocysts, have less or no diarrhoea and grow faster than untreated lambs.
- The aim is to reduce the contamination of pasture and lower the challenge facing the current and future batches of lambs.
- Diclazuril (**Dycoxan**) has no residual activity and it is rarely appropriate to be used on the day of turn-out. When susceptible lambs are moved onto contaminated land, it is recommended that the product is given 10-14 days later.
- Toltrazuril (**Baycox**) has a longer duration of action, making a single dose sufficient in most instances. The timing of dosing is also less critical, although one week after turn out onto contaminated land or a week before expected clinical disease is usually suggested.
- Decoquinate (**Deccox**) is an in-feed medication added to commercial creep feeds via a vet prescription. Each 10kg lamb must ingest a minimum of 100g of creep a day to maintain adequate levels of decoquinate medication. It is only active in the small intestine. Infected lambs may therefore continue to shed oocysts due to infection in the large intestine despite showing no signs of disease.
- Once the pathogenic species are on a farm, the lambs will be at risk each year. Plan ahead with your vet in your flock health plan to reduce the incidence of disease and damage to future growth rates.