



### **LAMENESS IN SHEEP**

The British sheep industry loses millions of pounds each year due to footrot alone and it is commonly quoted as the biggest welfare problem amongst our national sheep flock. To try to eradicate lameness in a flock is likely to be a fruitless task but costs and welfare can be greatly improved by understanding the causes of lameness and prompt and informed treatment.

The key principles of minimising lameness in the flock are:

- Isolate and treat lame sheep as quickly as possible with appropriate treatments
- Foot trimming should be kept to a minimum and feet must never be pared to the point of bleeding
- Always quarantine all new stock as infectious forms of lameness can be introduced on bought in sheep
- Select breeding stock with sound feet

The main causes of lameness are briefly outlined below. For further details and diagrams/photographs we recommend consulting the EBLEX manual 'Target lameness for better returns' which you can pick up at the practice or access online at [http://www.eblex.org.uk/documents/content/returns/brp\\_l\\_sheepsbrp\\_manual\\_7\\_-\\_target\\_\\_lameness\\_for\\_better\\_returns.pdf](http://www.eblex.org.uk/documents/content/returns/brp_l_sheepsbrp_manual_7_-_target__lameness_for_better_returns.pdf)

#### **Scald/Interdigital Dermatitis**

Scald is caused by a bacteria present in soil and faeces which enters the skin between the claws following damage to the skin (e.g. rough pastures or stubble or prolonged exposure to moisture). Signs are of pink inflammation between the claws with a grey layer of scum. Sheep can be very lame with minimal lesions. Treat individuals with antibiotic spray or where incidence is high, footbath the group and move them to pasture which has been free of sheep for 14 days or more.

#### **Footrot**

Scald damages the skin of the foot to allow another bacteria which lives on the feet of sheep (and for up to 2 weeks on pasture) to set up infection and cause footrot. Signs of footrot are distinctive due to the foul smell and separation of hoof horn starting at the interdigital space. Infection spreads rapidly in housed sheep due to stocking density. Treat affected sheep immediately with long acting antibiotics (Alamycin LA) and antibiotic spray and isolate them in a hospital field if at all possible. Do not immediately trim the feet as this delays healing. It is a good idea to cull sheep that have had footrot more than twice and do not breed replacements from sheep with known unsound feet. Consider vaccination with footvax in endemic flocks (consult with us as the practice). The quarantine of bought in stock for 28 days is essential to control of footrot.

#### **CODD (Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis)**

Infection starts at the coronary band as small ulcerated areas but the infection then spreads down towards the toe underneath the horn. In some severe cases the whole horn can fall off. Contrastingly to footrot, there may be scum and pus but no significant foul smell associated with the infection. In a naïve flock, a large percentage of sheep can be affected in the first year of an outbreak. If CODD is suspected you should seek vet advice on course of action but treatment will almost always involve injectable long



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acting antibiotics (e.g. Alamylin LA or micotil) and antibiotic footbaths off license. Do not trim away the loose horn. Prevention is difficult but infection can be kept out by quarantining purchase stock and those returning from mixing with other sheep for at least 28 days.

### **Toe Granulomas**

Most often caused by over-zealous foot trimming down to sensitive tissue that bleeds. It is now thought that sheep feet do not need to be routinely trimmed unless severely overgrown and lame because of this overgrowth. Do not trim feet which are lame due to scald or footrot.

### **Toe abscesses**

Caused by penetration of the hoof at the white line which leads to separation of the horn from the foot and abscess formation in the space. Treatment is through drainage of the abscess by paring of the sole as necessary then antibiotic treatment.