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Foot Lameness In Sheep

Lameness in sheep is an extremely common problem. It requires prompt diagnosis in order for treatment to be successful but even then can be a frustrating and time consuming problem

The two commonest causes of lameness in sheep are scald and foot-rot. Both are linked by a common cause, the bacteria *Fusobacterium necrophorum*. The bacteria is present in all ruminant faeces and therefore on any pasture grazed by sheep.

Scald

Scald occurs when the interdigital skin becomes infected by the bacteria *F. necrophorum*. This causes inflammation and pain but unlike in footrot, there is no under running of the horn. Treatment involves moving to dry pasture and daily application of Oxytetracycline spray. Footrot vaccines are ineffective against scald.

Foot-rot

Footrot starts as scald but involves infection with a second bacteria *Dichelobacter nodosus*. This bacteria is found only on infected feet but can survive for 2-3 weeks on pasture. The combination of the two bacteria causes separation of the horn from the underlying structures of the foot. The disease is associated with a characteristic foul smell. Treatment requires paring of the feet, Oxytetracycline spray and occasionally an antibiotic injection. A vaccine is available for prevention of footrot.

Some sheep will prove impossible to cure and repeat offenders should be culled, as they will simply re-infect their flock-mates. Susceptibility to footrot is inherited and so do not keep replacements bred from ewes or rams that are repeatedly lame with footrot.

Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis

CODD is serious infection characterised by lesions that begin at the coronary band and then rapidly spread down the hoof, often causing the whole hoof to be shed leaving a raw stump. This condition fails to respond to first line treatments used for footrot and you should seek veterinary advice if you think your flock is affected.

