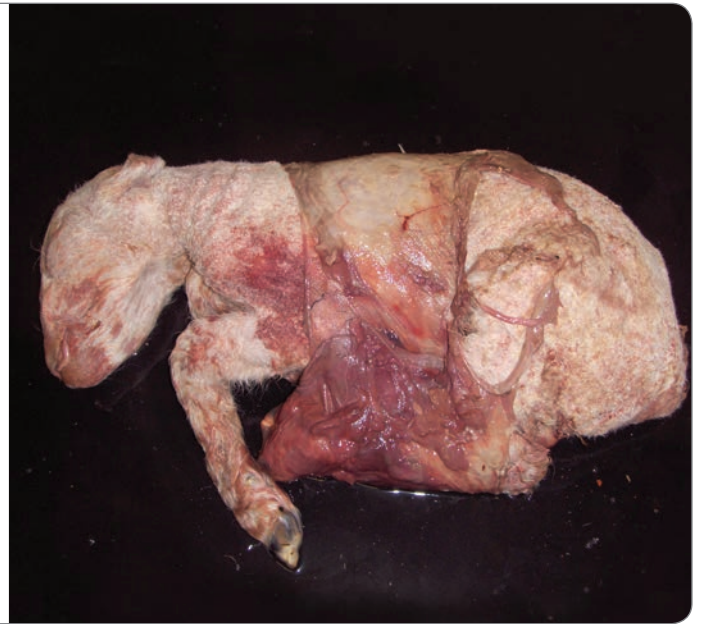


Ovine abortion

Abortion in sheep is common, but it should not be thought of as inevitable. There are excellent vaccines for the commonest causes of abortion and some of the other causes have factors that can be reduced.

The most common causes of abortion in sheep are:

1. **Enzootic Abortion (Chlamydomphila abortus)**
2. **Toxoplasmosis**
3. **Listeria**
4. **Campylobacter**
5. **Salmonella**
6. **Border disease**



Enzootic abortion

Chlamydomphila abortus is spread through vaginal secretions and placental membranes at lambing. Ewes are normally infected in one year and abort the next. The closer she is to term, the more likely she is to produce viable, but weak lambs. These lambs are technically still abortions and are usually infected with the organism themselves.

Infection causing only a few abortions one year can ultimately lead to over 30% of the flock aborting the following year producing 'abortion storms'.

This may also happen following vaccination of an infected flock, as most of the ewes were infected before vaccination. Sourcing replacement stock from flocks "accredited free" or of known status is strongly advised.

Oxytetracycline can be used as an emergency treatment for new outbreaks.



Toxoplasmosis

The signs seen depend upon the stage of pregnancy

Early Pregnancy	Barren ewes at scanning or returning to the tup
Mid Pregnancy	Mummified and aborted fetuses
Late Pregnancy	weak lambs or even normal lambs

Infection is only from cat faeces, so a lamb born to a toxoplasma infected ewe is not a carrier for the disease.

Treatment cannot be achieved with antibiotics, although decoquinatate can be fed throughout pregnancy, vaccination offers the best protection. Neutering farm cats also reduces the levels of infection.

Listeria

Usually from poor silage, but can be from soil when grazing is poor.

Salmonella and Campylobacter

Usually from other infected animals e.g. birds. There is no treatment and infection comes in waves, attention to hygiene is crucial.

Border Disease

More usually a cause of poor scanning results, it relies on carrier sheep and can be difficult to remove from the flock.

Tick Born Fever

Anaplasma phagocytophilum can affect the immune system and increase the susceptibility to other infections.



What can we do?

1. Vaccinate all breeding ewes and ewe lambs with Vaccines against Toxoplasma and Enzootic Abortion.
2. All replacement animals should be sourced from Enzootic abortion free flocks (accredited) and vaccinated before tupping. If not, the vaccine may not be as effective. This includes pet lambs.
3. Keep all food stores including hay, protected from contamination by cat faeces.
4. Isolated all aborted ewes away from the remainder of the flock, ideally for 4 weeks. Remove and burn all bedding from lambing pens and disinfect between ewes.
5. Keep aborted foetuses and placentas to submit to veterinary or AHVLA centres for investigation and diagnosis of cause.
6. **DO NOT** foster ewe lambs which could be kept as replacements onto aborted ewes – there is a high chance of the cause of abortion spreading to ewe lambs and causing abortion the following year.
7. **DO NOT** keep surviving ewe lambs for breeding from aborted ewes
8. Ewes that abort are regarded as immune, although may repeatedly abort
9. Use new Electronic Identification Tagging to your advantage – record abortions from individual ewes and use this information when making culling decisions in the future.
10. If you have suffered greater than 3% of your flock aborting you definitely need to investigate the cause as losses can escalate the following year. There are schemes available such as FlockCheck from MSD which is a FREE diagnostic service to test the flock for enzootic abortion/ toxoplasmosis. Ask your Vet for more information



Human Health

Many causes of abortion affect humans, therefore it is important that pregnant women are not involved with lambing or handling clothing in contact with lambing sheep, as these infections will cause abortion in humans. This includes feeding pet or weak lambs

Of particular concerns is Chlamydia abortion and Q fever, but salmonella and campylobacter are also problems



For further information contact your local **XLVets** practice:

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