

Mange and sheep scab – tips for helping customers

Vet **Richard Knight** provides some timely advice for your customers



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It's been a fine sight at last to see young sheep skipping and jumping around the fields, even some older ewes that look like they should know better!

As the temperatures get a little bit warmer too, we see quite a lot start rubbing themselves against anything solid, or 'scratin', as our farmers say up here. How do folk know if it's a problem though? Is it the dreaded sheep scab, or psoroptic mange, to give the disease its correct title?

Evidence of wool on any conceivable scratching post, including barbed wire, is an indication that they might need a further looking at. Sometimes the lesions on sheep can be quite small and hidden as small bald scaly patches under a long fleece. If the condition is chronic and neglected, then sheep will start to display large areas of fleece loss, along with dry scaly cracked skin which is oozing blood and serum.



Often, an entry point for itinerant neighbours' sheep can be found through poor fencing. Typically we also find that sheep dealers are the most successful at introducing scab onto sheep farms.

Proper diagnosis with a microscope is essential for this condition as chorioptic mange can co-exist with other bacterial and fungal skin conditions and mean that the wrong treatment is recommended.

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PSOROPTES OVIS

When we look at the causal mite of sheep scab, *Psoroptes ovis*, under a microscope, we look for important features such as the front leg, mouth and back-end anatomy to



make sure we get it right.

If scab is in fattening lambs, then it is crucial that the disease is identified accurately as early as possible in the clinical course as meat withdrawal issues from treatment become very important.

PLUNGE-DIPPING

Typically, plunge-dipping in an organo-phosphate (such as diazinon 62% w/v) dip will lead to the most obviously rapid cure, while injectable ectoparasiticides (dormectin, ivermectin and moxidectin) appear to take a week or 10 days, often, before a clinical improvement (less itching) is seen although they work just as well.

When injecting to treat scab, the datasheet must be read through with each client as ivermectin must be given subcutaneously as two injec-

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tions within a week, moxidectin as two subcutaneous injections 10 days apart and doramectin as a single intramuscular injection.

Check also, along with correct dosing, that the correct needle length and preferably a needle guard (also of the

correct specification) is being used.

SHOWER WARNING

It is worth noting too, that sheep showers are usually not successful in completely controlling scab – that's not to do down the showers, just a statement of fact with relation to sheep scab.

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