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FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER - MAY 2025

BLUETONGUE VIRUS—SHOULD WE BE VACCINATING TO PROTECT OUR STOCK?



Bluetongue is a viral disease affecting cattle and sheep which is spread by midges and can have devastating consequences. It initially entered the UK in 2024 via midges that were blown across the English channel and North sea from continental Europe and most of the confirmed outbreaks (approximately 250 cases) were in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

A protection zone was set up limiting movement of livestock out of these areas to reduce the risk of infected livestock moving into new parts of the country, getting bitten by midges which can then go on to bite other animals and spread the virus. Recently however infection has been confirmed on a farm in Lancashire indicating that the virus is already present outside the protection zone. Nobody has a crystal ball to know how big the problem will be this year but the concern is that when midges become more active as the summer progresses there could be many more cases to come.

Symptoms of Bluetongue

In sheep Bluetongue infection causes:

- An inflammation of the blood vessels around the face and feet resulting in swelling around the head (including eyes and nose) with sores in the mouth.
- Swelling of the throat area can lead to breathing difficulties resulting in the classical bluetongue symptoms.
- Inflammation above the hooves results in severe lameness.
- Infection of pregnant ewes can result in abortion or birth of deformed lambs similar in appearance to lambs infected by Schmallenberg virus.

In Europe last year approximately 30% of sheep that developed symptoms died and the sheep flock in Northern Europe has been reduced by approximately 20% due to Bluetongue infection.

- Infection in cattle initially appears less severe resulting in a drop in milk yields but there can also be a significant reduction in fertility with reduced conception rates, more barren cattle, abortions or subsequent birth of weak or deformed calves.

Vaccination

Bluetongue was devastating in Europe last year because no vaccine was available to protect stock. We have the advantage of vaccines being available which, whilst they won't stop animals from being bitten by infected midges, will massively reduce the clinical signs and consequences of being infected. Sheep can be protected with a single injection, cattle will need 2 doses of vaccine 3 weeks apart, with immunity developing 3 weeks after the vaccination course is complete. Vaccine is in short supply at the moment but larger batches are coming through shortly.

To find out more about vaccination or to be put on the waiting list for vaccine please contact the surgery and speak to one of the farm vets.

NEMATODIRUS & COCCIDIOSIS



Worm season has well and truly arrived in our lab! Our vet techs are busy with lamb WEC (worm egg counts) as we are seeing a significant number of scouring lambs and the samples from flocks who test routinely are showing up positive results for roundworms and coccidiosis.

As many of you know, the first gut worm that causes problems in lambs is Nematodirus. It has several clever adaptations which allow it to survive and cause so much damage.

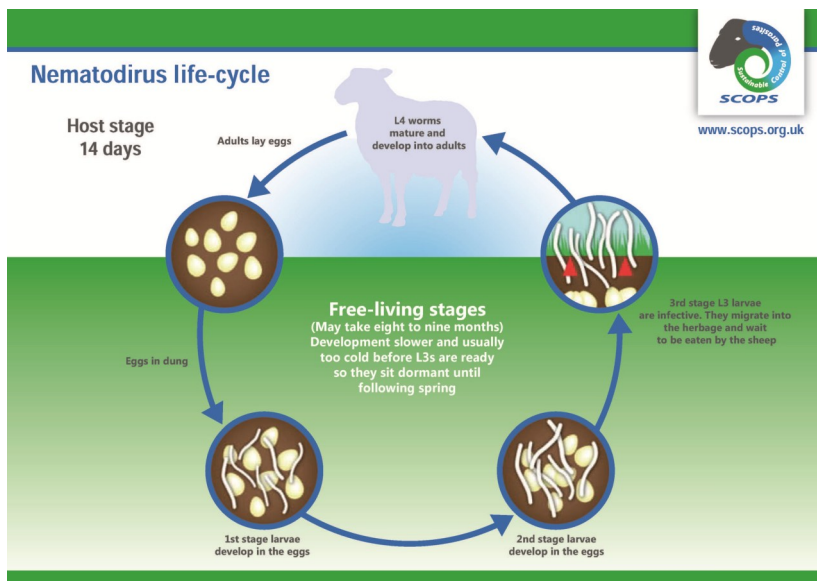
A thick-walled egg that hibernates on pastures for years, waiting for a period of warmer weather to hatch. The larvae coil around the gut lining to feed. If there is a mass hatch a large number of young Nematodirus larvae can cause severe scour, dehydration, and death in lambs.

In contrast to the worms we see during the summer and autumn months Nematodirus causes damage before the adult worms are producing eggs which can be detected in the sheep faeces.

This means that WEC are not ideal for monitoring for Nematodirus. We use the

weather forecasting stations to monitor ground temperatures and predict when Nematodirus are likely to hatch. The SCOPS website is the place to look for this information. We usually see disease due to this worm in April - May when lambs have started to graze and there is a hatch of worms simultaneously. **The forecast is moderate to high for our area** however, we are seeing a lot of infestations in lower farms, on the south facing fields, where the ground temperature is likely to be higher. This is being picked up on in-house WEC.

There is no resistance of Nematodirus to any wormers, we therefore use white drench if we **only** have Nematodirus, as all other sheep gutworms have advanced resistance to these drugs.



How to collect faecal samples for worm egg counts.

- 1 Gather animals & wait for poo
- 2 Collect samples wearing gloves, bag fresh poo individually
- 3 At least 10 bags per group, don't mix age groups
- 4 Squeeze air out of bags, tie, keep cool & label bags with field or group
- 5 info we need:
age of animals
how many in group
any scour or illness
last dose given, what and when



At least 10 individual samples each the size of a heaped teaspoon

bring into the surgery asap



Coccidiosis is another parasite that causes disease in lambs over 4 weeks of age. This is not a worm but a protozoa so it requires different drugs to control it. We often see coccidiosis and Nematodirus at the same time. This is troublesome in several ways: The lambs' guts have a double whammy of damage, and you should not dose with a wormer and a coccidiostat at the same time. The drugs will inactivate each other, you need to treat at least a few hours apart.

To complicate the parasite situation further this year we are seeing some strongyle worms at a level high enough to dose in some, but by no means all flocks! This means that white wormer may not be the best choice of drug due to its resistance.

The pattern of cocci, Nematodirus and strongyles vary field to field, farm to farm and year to year. Our advice is that a WEC should be undertaken before dosing lambs to avoid costly mistakes both in terms of cost and lamb health.

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway is still available, allowing farmers to take advantage of funding towards faecal egg count testing for sheep. Please speak to a farm team member for more information and how to apply.

BLOWFLY STRIKE - ARE YOU PREPARED?

Blowfly strike is caused by the larvae of *Lucilia sericata* (greenbottles), *Phormia terrae-novae* (blackbottles) and *Calliphora erythrocephala* (bluebottles). The life cycle is broken up into three distinct stages; the egg, the larvae and the adult. Flies over-winter in the soil as pupae, and emerge as temperatures rise during the spring. Adult female flies lay eggs on desired laying sites such as dirty back ends, foot rot lesions or open wounds. Eggs hatch into first stage larvae within approximately 12 hours. These larvae feed on tissue, grow and moult twice, becoming mature maggots in 3 to 10 days, depending on temperature and humidity. Third stage maggots then drop to the ground and pupate, and so the life cycle begins again.

Blowfly populations are at peak during the summer months. The entire life cycle from egg to adult can occur in less than 10 days. Maggots are active and voracious, causing skin and muscle liquefaction as they develop attracting secondary blowflies. Toxins released by decomposing tissues and ammonia secreted by the maggots are absorbed through the lesions into the sheep's blood, causing systemic illness which can result in death.

Managing worm burdens helps to prevent dirty backsides through scouring. 'Dagging' or 'crutching' decreases the amount of faecal matter build up which will help reduce the risk of blowfly strike. Hooves which are in good health and are free from

What is blowfly strike?



The greenbottle, *Lucilia sericata*, is the most common blowfly associated with strike.



Damage is caused by blowfly maggots feeding on the skin and underlying tissues of sheep.



It can happen quickly – significant damage can occur in as little as 24-36 hours after egg laying.²

foot-rot or severe scald will also assist in reducing the risk of blowflies becoming attracted and laying eggs.

In addition to the above points there are chemical based products which can be applied onto the fleece that will prevent the incidence of blowfly strike. Dicyclanil based products (**Clik: 16 weeks protection, Clik extra: 19 weeks protection**) will prevent blowfly strike but

	Meat Withdrawal	June	July	August	September	October	November
Clik Extra	40 Days	19 Weeks					
Clik	40 Days	16 Weeks					
Crovect	8 Days	6 Weeks					
Dysect	49 Days	8 Weeks					
Ectofly	8 Days	6 Weeks					

will not treat active blowfly strike. Due to the prolonged protection, many of those who use the products apply at first worm dose. The product spreads and binds to the lanolin, providing full fleece protection. The product is applied as per the weight of the lamb (e.g. a 10-20kg lamb receives 20ml of product). Clik and Clik Extra are Insect Growth Regulators (IGR); the products stop blowfly larvae developing to the damaging second and third stage maggots, which cause flystrike.

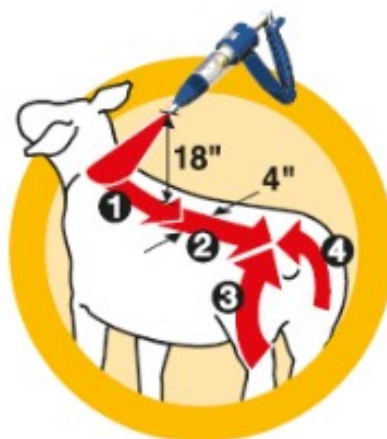
OP dips can treat and prevent blowfly strike as well as other external parasite infections for up to 60 days.

It is stated in the datasheet not to shear sheep for 3 months post treatment relating to human health.

Cypermethrin (**Crovect, Ectofly**) based products can also be used to prevent blowfly strike and treat

active blowfly strike infections. These provide a shorter protection window of up to 6-8 weeks and have a shorter meat withdrawal period with no restriction as to when a sheep can be clipped.

When using any products it is essential that all the manufacturers instructions are followed. Not doing so will affect the protection and may result in sheep becoming infested. We advise that sheep severely affected by blowfly strike are given antibiotics and NSAIDs. For more information regarding blowfly prevention or for a price on products we stock please contact the surgery and speak with one of the farm vets or SQPs.



For best results, always use the 4-stroke method (pictured left) when applying CLIK and CLIKZIN to ensure an accurate spread. Apply the total required dose one quarter at a time:

- 1 1/4 from midshoulders to middle back
- 2 1/4 from middle of back to top of tail
- 3 1/4 to one side of animal's tail and crutch
- 4 1/4 to other side of animal's tail and crutch

COCCIDIOSIS IN YOUNGSTOCK POST TURNOUT

There are three main infective species of coccidia in cattle, *Eimeria Bovis*, *Zuernii* and *Alabamensis*, the latter is commonly associated with diarrhoea in young stock 1-2 weeks after turn out. The period between picking up the parasite and start of symptoms is only six to eight days – much shorter than the other coccidial species of cattle. The scour that occurs may be put down to a change in diet, therefore it is important to investigate the potential presence of *Eimeria Alabamensis* at this stage as cattle can deteriorate extremely quickly. If cattle are grazing the same piece of land each year, it is more than likely the problem will repeat each subsequent year.

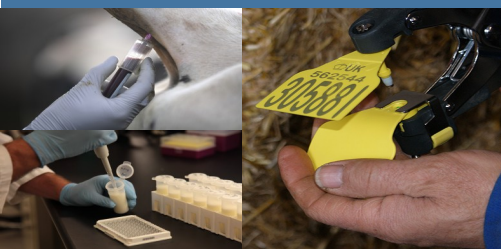
Some points to consider about coccidiosis diagnosis:

- Clinical signs can arise in the pre-patent periods with the onset of diarrhoea 4 days before to 1 day after oocyst shedding begins.
- The patent period can be very short and in acute infections oocyst output can drop sharply after the peak but diarrhoea can continue.
- Severe diarrhoea can lead to dilution of oocysts.
- We advise sampling more than one animal to increase the chance of detecting a high oocyst count.
- Chronic disease with re-infection, a partial immune response and lower numbers of oocysts excreted is commonly seen. The gut in these cases can be permanently damaged with evidence of ongoing active injury and partial repair.
- Request species identification in cases where high oocyst counts have been found after treatment. The short pre-patent period can suggest treatment failure if not confirmed as *E. Alabamensis*.



For more information, please contact the surgery.

BVD CONTROL SCHEME



BVD remains one of the most serious diseases affecting cattle in the UK. The impact of BVD can have devastating economic and health consequences including; reduced fertility, increased calf mortality and greater susceptibility to other infection. Understanding BVD, its symptoms, prevention and control is essential for maintaining a healthy and productive dairy or suckler herd.

In England the BVD Free scheme has transitioned to being part of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, a voluntary scheme which allows cattle owners to obtain funding toward obtaining a BVD status for their herd. The financial support is available to support herds where test results come back positive or negative. The AHWP scheme also incorporates a BVD biosecurity assessment.

We are advising our clients to engage and take full advantage of the funded BVD eradication scheme and vet visits, as once the BVD eradication scheme becomes mandatory in 2027, funding will be withdrawn. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the mandatory schemes continue to run and are making good progress towards eradication. As with BVD control schemes in Scotland and Ireland, once the scheme in England becomes compulsory, there will be several categories farms can fall into. There is going to be a consultation within the industry in autumn 2025, but the initial plan which has been drawn up is that any positive BVD tests, persistently infected animals or animals showing as 'not negative' will influence the category the farm ends up in. Any holding which is positive for BVD must start a PI hunt within 30 days, with all animals tested within a week. All calves born dead and alive and aborted fetuses are to be tag tested. Any animal identified as a PI must be slaughtered.

The BVD eradication scheme is a very big step up from the voluntary, no obligation phase we are currently in. This is why it is so important for our clients to take advantage of the Animal Health and Welfare funding so they can prepare and be ready for when BVD control becomes mandatory.

MAY
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