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G92-1075 Club Lamb Fungus Disease

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Club Lamb Fungus Disease

Club lamb fungus disease is a threat to both animals and humans. This guide reports on the disease cause, symptoms and treatment methods.

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Club lamb fungus disease is a relatively new health problem encountered mostly in sheep being exhibited at fairs and other shows. This disease appears to be contagious to humans and other animals.

First reported in 1989, it has occurred mostly in the western United States with epidemics in New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. Reports of the disease have been received from other parts of the country also. The Western States Livestock Health Association met in December, 1990, to discuss this increasingly serious problem. An overview of the discussion at this meeting is contained here. All persons handling affected animals should take proper safety precautions to protect themselves.

Cause

Club lamb fungus disease has several names including woolrot, lumpy wool, ovine ringworm, and ovine dermatophytosis. It is caused by a fungus that is a member of the genus *Trichophyton*. Microbiologists are working to identify the species which causes the disease. Sheep are susceptible to other fungal skin disease, however, they do not appear frequently. This disease appears to be the most contagious form of fungal disease in sheep.

Onset of Disease

The disease itself begins when the Trichophyton fungus enters the skin. Lanolin, the natural body oil found on sheep, is thought to play a role in preventing the fungus from entering the skin. Club or show lambs are more likely to contract the disease because frequent shampooing and washing for show removes lanolin from wool and skin. Frequent shearing also contributes to the disease as wool and lanolin are removed. Nicks and cuts caused by shearing allow the skin to become infected. Animals without a protective lanolin layer and with some form of skin damage are much more likely to become infected if the fungus is present.

Removing barriers to infection plus creating easy entry routes make show lambs prone to the disease. Fungal spores present in wool and skin provide a ready source of Trichophyton fungi when conditions are right for infection to begin.

Signs of Disease

The disease is identified by the presence of thick, scaly, usually round-appearing pustules on the skin. The head and neck area most frequently involved but other body areas may be affected also (*Figure 1*). The skin appears to be ulcerated, or covered with open sores, if scabs and wool are removed. This disease is most contagious during this scab stage.

Sheep infected with the fungus first begin with spots that expand to full size in 4 to 8 weeks. The size of infected areas varies with an average diameter of about one inch (*Figure 2*). Infections usually require 8 to 16 weeks for spontaneous recovery in individual animals.

The condition also may affect humans and other animals. These infections occur by entry of the fungus through the skin. If human infection is suspected, a physician should be contacted. Scarring of skin from infected areas has been reported in humans. Be sure to inform the physician the skin condition has possibly been acquired from sheep and that it may be a particularly contagious form of fungal disease.



Figure 1. Club lamb fungus disease is identified by the presence of thick, scaly, usually round-appearing pustules on the skin most often in the head and neck area.

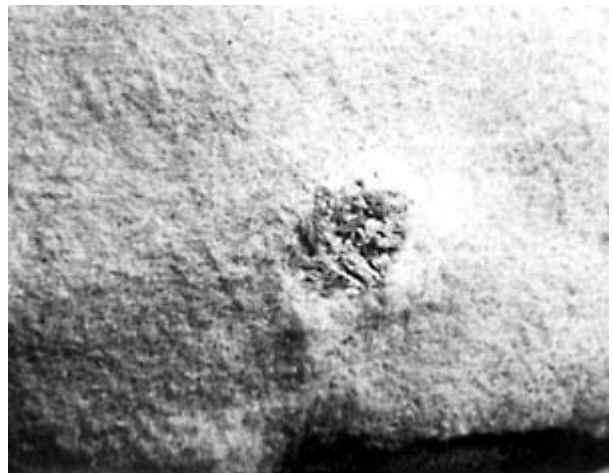


Figure 2. Club lamb fungus disease begins with spots varying in size with an average diameter of about one inch.

Spread of the Disease

This disease can spread from animal to animal or human as well as from contaminated equipment or surroundings. Trichophyton spores have been known to survive several years on animals and in the environment. Shears in particular have been implicated in spread of the disease. Susceptible lambs can become infected from contact with other lambs or from contaminated surroundings (stalls, barns, etc.) and equipment.

Diagnosis

Positive identification of the disease comes through visual appraisal of affected animals and by culture of the Trichophyton fungus from skin lesions. Due to the open sores, secondary bacterial infections are common. Contact your veterinarian for proper diagnostic procedures.

Treatment

No specific treatment for club lamb fungus has been identified, however, general antifungal medicines are available and will reduce spread of the disease. Both topical and oral treatment may be used and these drugs will help control fungal growth but not necessarily cure the disease.

Control and Prevention

Persons handling lambs should use rubber or surgical gloves when working with infected or suspected infected lambs.

Avoid nicks and cuts while shearing to reduce chances of fungal entry into the skin. Use of antifungal disinfectants on shearing equipment between animals will help control spread of the infections.

Noninfected sheep should be kept separate from infected animals to reduce exposure. Separately hauling animals to and from the fair is also recommended.

Show equipment, such as blankets, towels, and halters, should be used on individual animals only. If any equipment must be used on multiple animals, it should be disinfected between each use. Exhibitors should avoid sharing or exchanging equipment that might be contaminated.

If infection occurs, thorough cleaning and disinfection of premises and equipment with an effective antifungal product is recommended.

Nebraska Regulations

This is a contagious disease. Currently, animals with active ringworm will not be allowed entry into the Nebraska State Fair or the Aksarben livestock shows. Ringworm will be judged to be inactive if the affected area is not encrusted and hair has begun growth in the area. These standards are being recommended to the county fair boards.

Summary

Contact your veterinarian for a diagnosis if this condition is suspected in sheep. This disease is contagious to humans and a physician should be contacted if human infection is suspected. Observing proper precautions will help reduce risk to both animals and humans.

Photos courtesy of Dr. John Thilstead, New Mexico State University.

File G1075 under: ANIMAL DISEASE

C-3, Sheep

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