

May 2023 Newsletter

Don't get caught out by fly strike!

Blowfly strike is caused by the opportunistic invasion of living tissue by the larvae of greenbottle flies, which lay their eggs in soiled areas of a sheep's fleece. Blackbottle and bluebottle flies then attack and lay their eggs in areas which are already struck or damaged.

Blowfly populations are greatest during the summer months, although due to changes in climate the risk period can be from April to October in lowland areas such as Somerset. The entire life cycle of the flies from egg to adult can occur in less than 10 days in optimal conditions.

Blowfly strike is a major economic concern for sheep farmers with considerable prevention costs involved for all at-risk sheep. Sheep affected with blowfly strike have disrupted grazing patterns, rapidly lose weight, and can die, especially if untreated for several days.

Adult flies are attracted to areas of soiled fleece surrounding the tail or breech, and less commonly to wounds, footrot lesions, lumpy wool lesions on the skin, and urine scalding around the prepuce. The main clinical signs include:

- Isolation from the flock
- Discoloured wool
- Agitation and kicking or nibbling at the affected area
- Disturbed grazing
- Tissue decay
- Toxaemia (Shock)
- Death



Treatment of individual affected sheep involves physical removal of maggots, cleaning and disinfection of wounds and supportive treatment such as antibiotics, fluids and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) pain relief such as Metacam. Most fly treatment pour on products can be used for prevention of flystrike, but we recommend Crovect be used to treat affected sheep.

Treatment by plunge dipping using an organophosphate preparation may be undertaken in extreme cases where multiple sheep are affected.

There are various strategies that can be employed to reduce the risk of blowfly strike in the flock:

- Shearing ewes prior to the onset of the high-risk periods.
- Control of parasitic gutworms to reduce diarrhoea and therefore faecal contamination of the fleece
- Dagging or crutching of fleece around the tail area to reduce fleece soiling
- Dipping or use of pour-on chemical formulations to prevent strike or inhibit larval growth
- Correct disposal of carcasses in order to minimise suitable areas for flies to lay eggs
- Ensure all wounds and footrot lesions are treated promptly
- Trapping flies to help reduce overall fly populations - this must be used in conjunction with other control methods.

Hypomagnesaemia (Grass staggers)

Grass staggers is caused by low levels of magnesium in the body. It initially presents as excitability, twitching muscles, staggering gait, teeth grinding, followed by intermittent seizures with leg paddling, rapidly progressing to death. The disease is most commonly seen in recently calved beef cows but can occur in dairy cows and sheep, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy.

Cause:

The ultimate cause is low available magnesium in the diet. The magnesium levels in the soil and grass can vary considerably. High levels of potassium (application of potash fertilisers) disrupt the absorption of magnesium. High levels of ammonia (from nitrogenous fertilisers) inhibit magnesium absorption. Lush pastures are low in fibre and increase the rate of passage of food material through the rumen reducing time for the absorption. Therefore lush, recently fertilised pastures provide the highest risk.

Prevention:

Magnesium can be easily supplemented in the diet or in the water. If supplementing the water it is important to ensure it is the only source of water available to the animals as the magnesium makes the water unpalatable and the animals will avoid drinking it if they are able to. Rumen boluses are also available for cattle. In cases where animals are not supplementally fed at pasture, pastures may be dusted during high-risk periods with finely ground calcined magnesite every 10-14 days.



Recent study highlights benefit of using pain relief at calving.

A study by the University of Nottingham has demonstrated that dairy cows that receive pain killers (NSAIDs) around calving have significantly less chance of becoming lame/severely lame or being culled in the subsequent lactation.

This study demonstrated a 10% decrease in lameness on the farm followed. These findings have potential to have major benefits for animal welfare and production and dairy farmers especially should consider using more pain relief around calving. The treatment is likely to dampen systemic inflammation around calving and influence processes in the foot that pre-dispose to lameness (sole ulcer/white line disease). The study used Ketoprofen (**Kelaprofen**) but **Metacam** and **Rimadyl** (zero milk withhold) are likely to have similar effects.

Rimadyl is a product we are using more of due to its zero milk withhold and long duration of action (similar to Metacam). It is useful around calving if the cow hasn't received antibiotic dry cow tubes. It is also useful for cows that require therapeutic trims/blocks for lameness due to sole ulcer or white line disease or have suffered an injury as there is no need to discard milk and a single injection lasts a few days.

When it comes to digital dermatitis, lame cows that were treated with a pain killer as well as topical spray were more than 20 times less likely to still be lame seven days after treatment than those which were treated with topical spray only. Freshly calved lame cows with digital dermatitis produced over 10kg/day more milk over this seven-day period if they were treated with an NSAID.



Cool bags

If you have taken one of our cool bags to transport vaccines home from the practice please can you return them at your earliest convenience. Thank you.



Medicines course

We will be running the next medicines course on Wednesday the 7th of May at 2pm at Sedgemoor market. If you would like to attend please call the office on 01278 663399 and reserve yourself a place.