

Follow advice to prevent worm resistance in stock

WORMS can cause an animal to suffer and cost the farmer money, so it is important that the lifecycle is understood and the best treatment administered.

Where do my cattle and sheep get worms from?

Nematode worms are parasites that live in the gut or sometimes the lungs of cattle and sheep. They lay eggs which pass onto the pasture in the faeces of their host.

Under optimal conditions of temperature (greater than ten degrees Centigrade) and humidity (greater than 80 per cent), the eggs hatch and develop through a few larval stages to become infective larvae which attach themselves to the grass. These larvae are then ingested with the grass as the animal grazes and develop through another few larval stages to become adults capable of producing eggs and the lifecycle is complete.

What time of the year are my stock most at risk of picking up worm larvae?

Nematode eggs generally do not hatch when the temperature is ten degrees Centigrade and the optimal temperature range

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for eggs to hatch and develop to the infective larval stage is 18-26C. The level of pasture contamination with larvae therefore increases as summer progresses, reaching a peak in autumn.

Eggs and larvae can survive over winter on pasture but numbers decline rapidly as spring progresses to early summer.

Are all stock susceptible to worms?

Calves and lambs are born with no immunity to worms and are completely susceptible to disease. As they graze and are exposed to worm larvae, protective immunity develops provided the level of exposure is high enough to stimulate the immune system, but low enough not to kill the animal.

Therefore young stock are most susceptible and adult animals are relatively immune. However, even adult animals enduring a period of stress can lose their immunity. In ewes around lambing time, the stress and hormonal changes of late

pregnancy suppress their immunity resulting in worm eggs being produced and pasture contaminated just when a new crop of susceptible lambs are being produced.

How would I know if my stock have worms?

If the level of exposure and the worm burden being carried are low, then there will be no outward signs of infection. Higher levels of exposure cause clinical signs such as scour, weight loss and sometimes death.

Are there effective treatments available?

There have been three main classes of wormer available for the past 15 to 20 years. These are Class One Benzimidazole (white drench), Class Two Levamisole (yellow drench) and Class Three Macrocylic Lactone (clear drench). More recently, another class of wormer has been developed for sheep – Class Four Amino-Acetonitrile Derivative (orange drench). The different classes of wormer act in different ways to

kill the worms. These are available in injectable and pour-on form. The different method of delivery does not change the way that they work.

Unfortunately, the overuse/inappropriate use of wormers has resulted in the development of worms that are resistant to treatment.

How big a problem is worm resistance?

Studies in England and Wales, as part of the SCOPS initiative, indicate that in sheep resistance to the BZ group can be detected on nearly 100 per cent of lowland farms and 83 per cent of upland/hill farms. Levamisole resistance was detected on 47 per cent of lowland farms and 17 per cent of hill/upland farms, all of which also had BZ resistance.

How do I avoid worm resistance?

- Seek advice and work out a control strategy with your vet or adviser;
- Use wormers only when necessary – pre-treatment faecal worm egg counts (FWEC);
- Select the appropriate wormer for the task and administer it effectively;
- Test for wormer resistance



WORM THREAT: lambs are more at risk than adults

on your farm – post-treatment FWEC;

- Use effective quarantine strategies to prevent the importation of resistant worms in introduced sheep or cattle;

- Reduce the dependence on wormers by using management strategies to reduce pasture contamination, such as rotating grazing pastures with arable

crops, alternate grazing of pastures with cattle one year and sheep the next, or turning susceptible young stock onto relatively clean pasture such as hay or silage aftermath;

- Follow the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) guidelines and Control Of Worms Sustainably (COWS) guidelines in cattle.

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