

Worms or cocci – what’s causing my lamb scour?

If it’s not worms, it must be cocci right?
My lambs are scouring and I’m sure it’s not worms so it must be coccidiosis?

Is this right? Well, a few scenarios spring to mind.

Scenario one: lambs at four to six weeks old start scouring. You worm them. They continue scouring. So is it cocci? It could be. But it might not be, they may have Nematodirus and you may have underdosed them with wormer.

You may have wormer resistance (but to be fair, despite huge amounts of resistance in most worms, Nematodirus isn’t usually a problem for this (yet)! Could it be a nutritional scour from too much milk? Maybe, but not usually, so it might be cocci!

Scenario two: Lambs at four to six weeks start scouring. You do a worm egg count. No worm eggs are seen but there are some cocci oocysts (eggs). It’s cocci then? It might be, but the cocci may be a harmless strain – you need to know which

SCOURING ADVICE

Roger Scott, of Scott Mitchell Associates, Hexham, advises what to do if your lambs are scouring

strain it is. The level of infection may be too low to be a problem – the lab needs to actually count the oocysts.

It might be Nematodirus – remember the young Nematodirus worm causes a lot of damage well before it starts laying eggs so you can’t diagnose Nematodirus in such young lambs from a worm egg count. Again, it may be a nutritional scour from too much milk? Maybe, but probably not, so again, it might be cocci.

Scenario three: lambs at three to four months old start scouring. You worm them. They’re still scouring. You may not have given it long enough (two days isn’t enough). You may have wormer resistance – these days that’s the most likely explanation. You may have underdosed. Could it be cocci? A worm egg count at this age will tell you if it’s

worms or not. But what if cocci oocysts are detected? Again, they may be a harmless strain or they may be in small harmless numbers but at this age the lambs may be too old to have cocci. By this age, they are often toughened to it but if they’ve been on anticoccidial buckets they may not have developed immunity to cocci. So, they may have cocci. Could it be grass? Probably not! It’s highly likely its wormer resistance.

Too many questions, too many answers, so let’s keep it simple. These are a few key questions and answers:

- How old are lambs when they get cocci? Between two to eight weeks, but sometimes later depending on immunity interference from anticoccidial buckets.
- How old are lambs when they

get Nematodirus? Four to 12 weeks, but sometimes later depending on weather.

■ Can you diagnose early Nematodirus with a worm egg count? No, they aren’t laying eggs yet – you need a post mortem.

■ Can you diagnose late Nematodirus with a worm egg count? Yes.

■ Can you diagnose cocci with a worm egg count? Yes, but the lab needs to count them to see if they’re a bad strain or not.

■ Can you treat cocci? Yes, ask your vet – some treatments are better than others.

■ Do wormers always kill worms? Definitely not – wormer resistance is a huge problem.

■ What’s the current treatment for Nematodirus until we hear otherwise? White drench (not combined with flukicide)

■ When should you worm for Nematodirus? When the disease forecast says so (scops.org.uk/nematodirus-forecast) or if they scour and it’s not cocci.

■ When should you worm for



SCOUR CONTROL: Roger Scott, Scott Mitchell Associates, Hexham

standard gut worm? When your worm egg count says so, not before. Don’t over-worm.

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