

Haemonchus



Haemonchus contortus or the Barber's pole worm is an abomasal blood sucking worm, with the ability to remove large quantities of blood (0.05ml/day). The worm has a short life cycle of 20 days and a high egg output (5000-15,000 eggs per day), meaning pastures can become infected rapidly. This can lead to acute disease which presents as rapid anaemia or low blood levels, with the risk of death soon after infestation. Historically it was considered a problem in South East England, but is now spreading throughout the UK.

Clinical signs

Both adults and young sheep can show clinical signs. If lactating ewes are affected, lamb deaths and poor growth rates can be seen.

Acute Infestations:

- Weak animals who collapse if driven
- Pale mucus membranes (gums and eyes)
- Heavy breathing and increased heart rate
- Sudden death

Subacute infestations:

- Submandibular oedema (bottle jaw)

Chronic infections:

- Failure to thrive
- Weight loss
- Poor body condition score (BCS)
- Submandibular oedema (bottle jaw)
- Lethargy
- Weakness

The degree of anaemia can be assessed through the FAMACHA test. This uses mucus membrane colour on the lower eyelid conjunctiva to assess the extent of anaemia with scores ranging from 1-5.

This can be used during risk periods to assess the need to drench.



Unlike other strongyle worms, adult sheep do not develop strong acquired immunity to *haemonchus*.

Management

The best management plan is to avoid bringing *Haemonchus* onto the farm, through a robust quarantine protocol. Incoming stock should be isolated for 4 weeks and treated with an appropriate product. Diagnosis is made through clinical signs, WEC's and identifying adult worms on a post-mortem examination. Regular BCS and FAMACHA scoring when handling adults may provide early detection of a problem.

Treatment

Anthelmintic resistance in *Haemonchus* is a common problem worldwide so assessing adults and treating accordingly will avoid resistance development. Accurate diagnosis can aid anthelmintic choice. Closantel and Nitroxynil are the narrow-spectrum treatments of choice for *Haemonchus*.

Heat Stress

In the event of an improved weather forecast, livestock are at risk of heat stress at this time of year. Heat stress occurs as a result of an animal's high metabolic rate producing heat (such as a dairy cow producing milk) and an inability to dissipate that heat (such as being overstocked or poor ventilation).

Signs of heat stress are animals becoming quiet and lethargic, they begin standing with their heads bowed, they will be breathing heavily and, in some cases, start to pant.

Rarely, animals will get heat stroke, where they become overheated in a short space of time to the point where their bodies cannot cope. These animals are dazed, panting and have a very high body temperature. Active cooling with tepid water should be started, this can be done by hosing down the animal and standing them in shallow water if possible. Once the animal has initially recovered, an anti-inflammatory should be administered, the animal should be offered drinking water and closely monitored.

PAY BY DIRECT DEBIT

There's a new way to pay!

You can now sign up to pay by direct debit and automate your payment process – saving you time and effort.

Please register your interest with the Farm Office on 01889 567200.



Methods to reduce the risk of heat stress and heat stroke should be considered. Some cattle monitoring devices such as collars indicate cows in heat stress and the patterns can be monitored to identify risk periods. All grazing animals should be in fields with shade available and easily accessible clean water sources. Milking dairy cattle can drink upwards of 60L per day. Additionally, improving ventilation at times animals are grouped is important, for example in holding areas or feeding areas. Consider first easy methods to improve ventilation, such as cutting back vegetation surrounding the sheds, or improving side inlet ventilation by opening doors or removing panels. Many farms are installing more advanced methods of ventilation such as fan systems in the sheds, and in some cases water sprinklers are installed in collecting yards.

