All the latest news and advice from our expert team

Farm news

May 2026

Nematodirus in Lambs

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The information and advice in this article are based on the SCOPS nematodirus material.

Nematodirosis can be a devastating disease in lambs, causing deaths and stunted growth. It is caused by the *Nematodirus battus* worm, which has a different lifecycle to other sheep worms. Under certain climatic conditions it can strike very quickly, with little or no warning. This means we need to be vigilant.

The main difference in the lifecycle of *Nematodirus battus* compared with other parasitic worms is that development to an infective larva takes place within the eggs which were shed on pasture by last year's lamb crop. Before these larvae can hatch, the eggs have to undergo a period of cold weather followed by warmer temperatures of 10°C or more. In many cases this is a gradual process and lambs acquire immunity over 8-10 weeks, but if these conditions occur over a short period of time, it can trigger a 'mass hatch' resulting in a very high larval challenge. If this sudden exposure to large numbers of immature larvae on pasture coincides with the time when lambs are starting to take in significant amounts of grass (over about six weeks old), the disease can be severe.

The timing of a potential problem will vary from year to year, region to region and even field to field. In the Midlands, we often see *Nematodirus* hatches in April and May, but this varies a lot year to year. At the time of writing (late April), much of the Midlands is at, or just after, peak hatch. The larvae survive for 2-3 months on pasture, so if you haven't thought about *Nematodirus* already this year, now would be a good time to do so!

Faecal Egg Counts (FECs) are an unreliable indicator of risk for *Nematodirus* because the larvae that cause disease do so before they mature and start producing eggs.

The SCOPS *Nematodirus* Forecast is therefore an essential tool and, when combined with a risk assessment for groups of young lambs, it can ensure that treatments are given when necessary and at the most effective time, and before disease is seen. The decision on **IF** and **WHEN** a treatment may be required has to be based on two factors:

1.How 'at risk' is a group of lambs?

Whether a group of lambs is at risk of nematodirosis, should there be a peak in hatching larvae, is based on the following factors:

- **Are the lambs grazing fields that carried lambs last spring?** If so, it is likely there will be Nematodirus larvae on the pasture.
- **Are they in the 'at risk' age range?** Lambs need to be grazing to pick up larvae. For lambs that are otherwise healthy and whose dams are milking well the risk period is from 6-12 weeks of age. Beyond this they will have acquired immunity.
- **Are the lambs under pressure to graze at an earlier age?** For example triplets, lambs whose dams are not milking well (older or younger ewes), or fostered lambs will normally start grazing at an earlier age and could be at risk below 6 weeks of age.
- **Are there other challenges?** A concurrent issue with coccidiosis, particularly in groups of lambs with a wide age range, will increase the risk to lambs, causing clinical disease at lower levels of challenge.

2.What is the temperature profile for the area where the lambs are grazing, and therefore what level of challenge do they face from hatching larvae?

Here's where the SCOPS *Nematodirus* forecast comes in. Check the forecast regularly to see if 'at risk' lamb groups are likely to be facing a challenge from large numbers of hatching larvae, as indicated by dots on the most appropriate weather station. The map is updated daily so you can pick up when the peak is occurring and when peak hatch has passed. Historical data is also provided for context.

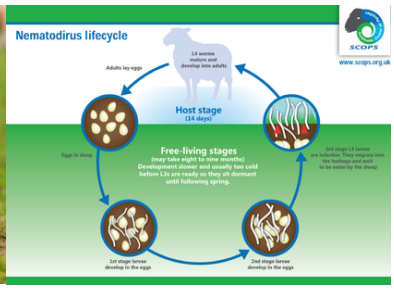
Have a look at the forecast - it takes away the guesswork. Find it here:

https://www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/

There's even a handy video to help you learn how to use it.

Recommendations

- If possible, avoid the high challenge. Move at-risk lambs (as determined by the risk assessment) to low-risk pastures (i.e. pasture that was not grazed by lambs the previous spring).
- If treatment is required, SCOPS advises farmers to use a white (1-BZ) drench. Use the SCOPS 'Know Your Anthelmintics' Guide to select a product. The white drenches are still highly effective against *Nematodirus* on most farms and are suitable for young lambs. However, because there have been a small number of cases of resistance confirmed, you should check that a treatment was fully effective by taking a dung sample for a FEC seven to ten days after treatment. Remember, it may be necessary to treat lambs more than once depending on the spread of ages in a group and subsequent weather conditions.



ScarsdaleVets FARM VETS
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Welcome Sophie!

A big welcome to the team to our newest ATT (Approved Tuberculin Tester), Sophie Holdcroft. Sophie joins Jess and Rosie, our existing ATTs, who do a great job in organising and carrying out much of our TB testing.
Many of you will already know Sophie (or at least recognise her voice!) from her time on our reception team, and we're delighted that she's taken on this new role. Sophie has undergone rigorous theoretical and practical TB testing training over the last few months, has passed all her assessments with flying colours, and is looking forward to getting started out on farms.

Save the Date!

Ruminant Population Health Group Knowledge Exchange Day
Wednesday 17th June, Nottingham Vet School, Sutton Bonington Campus

Based upon the success of last year's event, the Vet School are expanding the day this year to all vet practices and dairy,beef and sheep farmers in the locality. Clinical associate practice vets and farmers (including Scarsdale's clients!) will be invited with free of charge tickets/complimentary lunch and refreshments.

This event is intended to celebrate the vet school's community of research and teaching, including everyone linked to farm animal teaching and research, clinical associates, farmers, students and the wider farming community.
The plan for the day is as follows:

- 9.30am: Arrival, tea and coffee
- 10am: Welcome/introductions
- 10.15-12pm: Research group knowledge exchange across sector topics (welfare, lameness, youngstock, sheep) & interactive game show session on research design
- 12-1.30pm: Lunch & networking/relevant industry stands (AHDB, ROMS, QMMS etc)
- 1.30-4pm: Split into species specific streams:
- Dairy: Centre for Dairy Innovation (University dairy farm) tour with research station seminars (calf housing, cow housing etc)
- Sheep/beef: University abattoir tour, pathology seminar in dissection facilities

Official invites will follow, but please let us know if you're interested and we can make sure you get a ticket. The more the merrier!

Animal Health and Welfare Pathway: Reminder
If you haven't engaged with the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway yet, which provides payments to livestock keepers to fund farm visits by vets, don't forget about it – it's still available. The pathway provides funding to reduce endemic diseases and conditions, increase animal productivity and improve animal welfare.
To get funding, you must apply for an Improve Animal Health and Welfare (IAHW) agreement. You'll need your Rural Payments service customer reference number (CRN) and password to sign in. Applying takes about 5 minutes. Sign up here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/farmers-how-to-apply-for-funding-to-improve-animal-health-and-welfare
Once you've signed up and your agreement is in place, we need to do the specified testing, and then one or more farm visits. Farmers can claim for multiple species on one farm, and also for multiple separate flocks or herds of the same species.
The funding available is as follows:

Funding amounts for vet visits from 22 January 2026

Species	Animal health and welfare review funding	Endemic disease follow-up funding
Pigs	£648	£1,087
Sheep	£574	£658
Beef cattle	£647	£954 for a follow-up with a persistently infected (PI) hunt or £258 for a follow up without a PI hunt
Dairy cattle	£447	£1,844 for a follow-up with a persistently infected (PI) hunt or £258 for a follow up without a PI hunt

Farms can have up to three cycles of Review – Follow-up. The scheme is due to close in June 2027.
Please do talk to us about this – we'd love to help you engage with it.
It may be worth doing this sooner rather than later, because Defra is proposing a mandatory:

- annual Animal Health and Welfare Review (vet visit) for cattle, sheep and pigs
- annual flock health plan for sheep
- eradication programme for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) in cattle
- control and eradication programme for Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) in pigs

The consultation on these mandatory measures is open until 18th May 2026, so do take part if you want to have your say: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/animal-health-and-welfare-pathway-mandatory-proposals

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Mickleover 01332 518585
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Pride Veterinary Centre 01332 678333
Shelton Lock 01332 700321
Stapenhill 01283 568162
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