



SHEEP ABORTIONS & VACCINATION

INTRODUCTION

There are many different pathogens that can cause sheep to abort, the most common are Enzootic (Chlamydia), Toxoplasmosis, Campylobacter, Border's Disease, Salmonella, Listeriosis and Schmallenberg. Some of these diseases are preventable via vaccination and will be discussed further on this fact sheet.

Toxoplasma (Toxo) and *Chlamydia abortus* (Enzootic or EAE) cause **abortions, still births, weakly lambs and barren ewes**. Both of these diseases can result in catastrophic losses and should be investigated as soon as they are suspected. Disease free flocks can easily become infected by purchased stock or from neighbouring sheep. If a naive or non-vaccinated farm experiences more than a couple of abortions in their flock they should have them tested to rule out Toxo and Chlamydia. A relatively small percentage of sheep will have abortions or still births this first year, but if the flock is left unvaccinated, there will be a massive abortion storm the following year.

DIAGNOSIS

If you have more than 3% of a group of ewes aborting, then it should be investigated. **The aborted foetus along with a bit of cleansing should be submitted to the lab for analysis.** Ewes that have aborted should be isolated until a diagnosis is confirmed.



We can also do subsidised blood sampling of ewes at any time to check for exposure to the diseases e.g. barren ewes after scanning or after lambing time.

WHAT IS TOXOPLASMA?

Toxoplasma is a microscopic parasite that is commonly found in cat faeces. A single cat dropping can contain enough eggs to infect 100 ewes. The cat's droppings are accidentally eaten by ewes in feed, forage or on the pasture. Young cats are most likely to spread the disease on your farm as older cats become immune to the Toxoplasma. The main reservoir of Toxoplasma infection is maintained in rodents, which then pass it onto cats, so controlling cats on your farm will be largely ineffective. Toxoplasma abortions can occur at any time during the ewes pregnancy.



WHAT IS CHLAMYDIA (EAE)?

Chlamydia or Enzootic is a bacteria that causes abortions in sheep and humans. The disease is usually brought onto a farm via replacements. Infection of ewes is via contaminated placentae, dead lambs or from vaginal discharges from freshly lambed ewes. Bedding in lambing barns can quickly become very contaminated with the bacteria. Abortions usually occur in the last 3 weeks before lambing. Sheep that have aborted are unlikely to abort again the following year, but they will continue to shed the bacteria spreading it to in contact sheep.

HOW TO STOP FURTHER ABORTIONS

If either Toxoplasma or Chlamydia is confirmed on your farm then the only way to protect your sheep is to vaccinate them. Gimmers joining the breeding flock and any purchased ewes will be most at risk, as they may be naive to the diseases. If a sheep is naive to either of these diseases and becomes infected during pregnancy she is likely to abort.

The vaccines for these two diseases are 'Toxovax' and 'Enzovax' and can be injected at the same time for easier management. Vaccination against Toxo and Chlamydia should be undertaken at least a month before tupping. This will ensure they are fully immune before mating, protecting their lambs. Remember to order the vaccines at least 7 days before you intend to use them, and ensure that you use them quickly because Toxovax has a very short shelflife (only 7-10 days from manufacturing).

In addition to vaccination (which will only help reduce abortions in the following lambing season), if Chlamydia is confirmed on your farm it is advisable to blanket treat all in-lamb ewes with antibiotics to try to reduce the number of abortions in the current season. Oxytetracycline is the most effective.

KEY POINTS

Toxovax protects ewes against Toxoplasma

Enzovax protects ewes against Chlamydia (EAE)

Ewes should be vaccinated 4 weeks before tupping

Don't forget to vaccinated replacements and purchased stock

Blood sampling and/or analysis of foetus and cleansing (placenta) will confirm the presence of Toxo and Chlamydia in ewes

Abortion storms in unvaccinated, naive flocks can be devastating

Enzootic abortion is zoonotic (pregnant women are at risk)



For further information, please contact us at the addresses below:

Lancaster Practice

Bank Top, Lancaster Auction Mart
Wyresdale Road, Lancaster LA1 3JQ
Tel: 01524 60006

Kendal Practice

Unit 2b, J36 Rural Auction Centre
Crooklands, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7FP
Tel: 01539 567899