



URGENT NEMATODIRUS WARNING!!!

Sheep farmers must be on their guard against Nematodirus now that the weather has warmed up, warns SCOPS. Such a sudden change from cold days and frosty nights is when Nematodirus is at its most dangerous with a mass hatch of over-wintered parasites forecast. There have already been some reports of disease in recent days from the VLA. Farmers are urged to consider the risk factors below, consult their vet with regard to local risks and treat lambs that are at risk.

The Disease

Nematodiosis is a particularly nasty disease in lambs, causing a high number of mortalities and stunting the growth of many others. It is caused by the worm *Nematodirus battus*, which has a different life-cycle to other sheep worms and under certain climatic conditions can strike very quickly, with little or no warning. This means that sheep farmers have to be on their guard.

The main difference in the life cycle of *Nematodirus battus* compared with other parasitic worms, is that development to an infective larvae takes place within the egg and infection passes from one lamb crop to the next years crop. Before they can hatch, the eggs have to undergo a period of cold weather followed by warmer temperatures of 10°C or more. If these conditions occur over a short period of time, triggering a mass hatch, and it coincides with the time when lambs are starting to take in significant amounts of grass, the result can be devastating.

Because this disease strikes so quickly and the damage is done by large numbers of immature larvae that are not producing eggs, we can't afford to have a 'wait and see' policy with Nematodirus. Farmers have to act on the basis of risk assessment and advice on the level of challenge in their area.

How do we know if the risk is high?

The main risk factors to consider are:

- **Lambs grazing pasture that carried lambs the previous spring**
- **A sudden, late cold snap which is followed by a period of warm weather**
- **Lambs that are old enough to be eating significant amounts of grass (6–12 weeks old)**
- **Groups where there is also likely to be a challenge from coccidiosis**
- **Lambs that are under other stresses e.g. triplets, fostered, on young or older ewes.**

The timing of a potential problem will vary from region to region. In the south of England for example, it is likely to occur earlier in April/May; in northern England and Scotland it may be early June.

Watch out for Warnings

Sheep farmers need to assess these risk factors and then watch carefully for warnings given by experts that will be issued for various parts of the country. They will be looking at reports from farms and the climatic conditions and issuing guidance on if, and when farmers should treat.

Treatment

If farmers feel their lambs are at risk and they need to treat for *Nematodirus*, then SCOPS advises farmers to use a white (BZ) drench. These are highly effective against this parasite and suitable for young lambs. There is no known resistance to BZs in this species of worm which means they can be used even where BZ resistance in other worms is confirmed, reducing the selection pressure put on the other two groups of wormers, helping to keep them working longer.

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For SCOPS
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