



Common Illnesses in Goats & Sheep

Sheep and goats are generally hardy animals, but they are susceptible to a variety of illnesses that can affect their overall health and productivity. Timely diagnosis and proper treatment are essential for ensuring the well-being of your flock. Below are some common illnesses that can affect sheep and goats, their symptoms, and treatment options.

Foot Rot

- **Description:** Foot rot is a bacterial infection that affects the hooves, often caused by a combination of moisture, bacteria (*Fusobacterium necrophorum*), and poor hygiene.
- **Symptoms:** Lameness, swelling of the affected foot, foul-smelling discharge from the hooves, and heat in the hooves. In severe cases, the affected animal may be unable to walk.
- **Treatment:** Trim the hooves and remove any decaying tissue. Antibiotics or antiseptic foot baths may be recommended to treat the infection. Keeping the environment clean and dry helps prevent further outbreaks.

Caseous Lymphadenitis (CL)

- **Description:** Caseous Lymphadenitis is a bacterial infection caused by *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*, leading to abscess formation in the lymph nodes and internal organs.
- **Symptoms:** Swelling or abscesses around the neck, jaw, and other lymph nodes. In advanced stages, internal abscesses may develop, leading to poor growth, weight loss, and general weakness.
- **Treatment:** Abscesses can be drained, and antibiotics may be used in some cases. However, there is no cure for internal abscesses, so prevention (through vaccination) and management of external infections are critical.

Johne's Disease

- **Description:** Johne's disease is a chronic, infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis*, affecting the intestines of ruminants.
- **Symptoms:** Chronic diarrhea, weight loss despite normal or increased appetite, and sometimes edema (fluid retention). It can take years for symptoms to appear, and by the time they do, the disease is often severe.
- **Treatment:** There is no cure for Johne's disease. Infected animals should be culled to prevent the spread of the disease. Biosecurity practices, including testing and isolation

of new animals, are important for prevention.

Pneumonia (Respiratory Infections)

- **Description:** Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or environmental stress factors.
- **Symptoms:** Coughing, nasal discharge, labored breathing, fever, lethargy, and decreased appetite. Pneumonia is more common in young, stressed, or poorly housed animals.
- **Treatment:** Antibiotics for bacterial pneumonia, supportive care like hydration, and improving the animal's living conditions (e.g., ventilation) to reduce stress and exposure to pathogens. Vaccination can help prevent respiratory infections.

Internal Parasites (Worms)

- **Description:** Sheep and goats are commonly affected by internal parasites, such as gastrointestinal worms (e.g., *Haemonchus contortus*, commonly known as barber pole worm) that affect the stomach and intestines.
- **Symptoms:** Weight loss, diarrhea, anemia (pale mucous membranes), and bloating. In severe cases, parasitic infestations can cause death.
- **Treatment:** Deworming medications (anthelmintics) can be used to treat internal parasites. However, overuse of dewormers can lead to resistance, so it's important to rotate deworming treatments and conduct fecal egg count testing to monitor parasite loads.

Tetanus

- **Description:** Tetanus is caused by the bacterium *Clostridium tetani*, which enters the body through wounds, typically deep punctures or cuts.
- **Symptoms:** Muscle stiffness, inability to open the mouth (lockjaw), a stiff gait, and in severe cases, paralysis and death.
- **Treatment:** Immediate veterinary intervention is necessary. Tetanus antitoxin and antibiotics may be administered. Affected animals should be kept in a quiet, dark environment. Tetanus can be prevented by regular vaccination.

Mastitis

- **Description:** Mastitis is an infection of the udder, usually caused by bacteria, and is common in dairy sheep and goats.
- **Symptoms:** Swelling, redness, or heat in the udder, a decrease in milk production, and milk that may appear clumpy, watery, or have a bad odor.
- **Treatment:** Antibiotics are typically used to treat bacterial mastitis. It's important to continue milking the infected udder to prevent milk from becoming trapped, and to practice proper hygiene during milking. In severe cases, the affected udder may need to be removed.

Abortion (Bacterial, Viral, or Parasitic)

- **Description:** Abortion can occur in sheep and goats due to various causes, including bacterial infections (e.g., *Chlamydia abortus*), viral infections (e.g., *Bluetongue virus*), or parasitic infections (e.g., *Toxoplasmosis*).
- **Symptoms:** Aborted fetuses, premature birth, or stillborn lambs or kids. Infected animals may show signs of fever, lethargy, or vaginal discharge.
- **Treatment:** Treatment depends on the cause of abortion. For bacterial infections, antibiotics may be effective, while for parasitic or viral causes, appropriate vaccines, dewormers, or other treatments may be needed. Aborted fetuses should be disposed of properly to prevent disease spread.

Bloat (Ruminal Distention)

- **Description:** Bloat occurs when gas builds up in the rumen and cannot be released, leading to distension of the abdomen.
- **Symptoms:** A swollen, distended abdomen, discomfort, and difficulty breathing. In severe cases, bloat can lead to death if not treated promptly.
- **Treatment:** If bloat is caused by grain overload, it may require the administration of anti-foaming agents, or even a rumen trocar to relieve gas. In less severe cases, walking the animal may help, and a veterinarian may need to insert a stomach tube or perform surgery in extreme cases.

Sheep and goats can suffer from various health issues, but with proper care, many of these illnesses can be prevented or managed. Regular health checks, vaccinations, a balanced diet, and appropriate parasite control are key factors in keeping your animals healthy. If you notice signs of illness in your flock, it's essential to consult with a veterinarian to get a proper diagnosis and treatment plan to ensure a swift recovery and minimize the spread of disease.