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Foot Rot in Sheep

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Foot Rot in Sheep

Foot rot in sheep is caused by an infection and survives best in injured tissue around or on the hoof. Wet ground in the corral or pasture may aggravate but not actually cause foot rot. The infection will die out in a short time (less than four weeks) in the mud and litter of a corral or pasture. However, the infection gets started in cuts, scratches, punctures, or bruises on the tissues of the foot. Therefore, pastures with trash and sharp objects, or corrals with sharp rock on the surface could produce the contributing injury needed to open the way for foot rot infection to start.

Lameness is a common sign that foot rot is present although some animals may have it without being lame. Because of this, treatment of *lame animals only* does not always bring the disease under control. Further, animals can be lame without having foot rot infection.

It is important, therefore, to make certain of the diagnosis before treatment is started. If there is any question concerning diagnosis, consult your local veterinarian.

Successful treatment of foot rot depends upon complete, thorough procedures.

1. The feet of *all* animals in the flock should be examined, trimmed, and treated.

2. All dead tissue should be trimmed off the foot if the treatment is to be effective.

3. After working on a sheep with foot rot, wash the trimming shears or knives and let soak at least 3 minutes in a strong disinfectant (10% formalin will do) before working on another sheep. Having two or three trimming instruments will speed up the work.

4. Separate infected from noninfected sheep before treatment.

5. The most economical and effective treatment known is to have sheep walk through a trough filled 2 to 2½ inches deep with a saturated copper sulfate (blue-stone) solution. Dissolve 2½ pounds of *finely ground* bluestone in each gallon of water to produce the proper strength. A 10% formalin solution in the trough will give equally good results. *Be careful with these solutions as they are irritating to human beings.* Convenient troughs can be made of 2-inch by 12-inch solid planks with 1-inch by 6-inch boards for sides and ends, and painted inside with asphalt. Three such troughs 10 feet long should be made for ease in handling and storage. The troughs are placed level, end to end, with panels

along the sides to make a chute. The first trough should be filled with clean water so the animals' feet can be washed before being treated with solution in the next two troughs.

6. Put all animals through the treatment chute. The noninfected animals should be put through first, followed by those that are infected. To prevent the possibility of copper poisoning due to contaminated feed and pasture, hold the treated sheep in a restricted area for an hour or so to allow the excess copper solution to drain off.

7. Place noninfected animals in clean corrals or pastures. Infected animals should be kept from the others until they have recovered. One treatment, if carefully done, will correct most cases. Badly infected animals may require two or more treatments one or two weeks apart. Dispose of the animals that do not respond.

8. Before returning the cured animals to the noninfected flock have them walk through the treatment solution.

9. After having eliminated the infection, remember the adage about an ounce of prevention. If a ranch is free of foot rot animals will not become infected unless the infection is carried onto the place in some manner. Before adding sheep to a flock examine their feet and put them through a treatment solution as a precaution. Should you visit a sales yard or ranch where foot rot may be present thoroughly clean your footwear so you will not carry infection back to the home flock. If you hire a commercial rig to haul your sheep from one place to another, insist that it be clean before loading. Since injury to the foot opens the way for foot rot infection to get started, do what you can to prevent injury to the feet of your sheep. These are a few suggestions on how to prevent foot rot. Add others as they may occur to you.