

Livestock Health Series

Ringworm in Sheep and Goats

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Introduction

Ringworm, also known as wool fungus, is a fungus typically from the Trichophyton or Mycosporum genera. Ringworm is highly contagious and zoonotic, meaning it can cause disease in humans. Typically, ringworm infects skin on the face, ears, neck and body of sheep and goats. Spores from the fungi reproduce and have a long survival rate in the environment. Young animals, animals living in dark and damp environments, animals having nutritional diseases and show animals are most susceptible.

Signs and Symptoms

Sheep and goats develop crusty, scaly, circular patches that may or may not be pruritic (itchy). They usually appear as small areas of hair or wool loss on the sheep or goat that are typically 1 inch in diameter. In sheep, wool fibers may clump together causing them to become stiff and stand upright.

Sheep and goats used for exhibition are at a much higher risk of contracting ringworm due to shearing practices, which cause exposure of the skin and the spread of fungal spores. Additionally, repeated washing and grooming deplete the skin of natural oils, and exposure to other infected sheep or goats, infected equipment or infected pens poses a higher risk



The small areas of wool that look off colored or are missing are signs of wool fungus in sheep.

for show animals in contracting ringworm. Diagnosis is typically made by visual examination and/or microscopic examination of hair or skin scale. A definitive diagnosis and identification of the organism is made by a fungal culture.

Treatment and Prevention

It is important to isolate infected animals so they do not spread ringworm to the rest of the flock or herd. The infection is usually self-limiting, taking a couple weeks to clear, but topical fungicides can be used to treat the lesions directly, speeding the healing process. Providing a good plane of nutrition and a less stressful environment may also aid in the healing process.

Ringworm has run its course and is considered non-infective when new wool or hair growth becomes visible, the skin is smooth and the hair sur-

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rounding the healing lesion is not easily removed when pulled. It is not uncommon for wool to grow back black.

When treating ringworm, it is imperative to wear gloves, long sleeves and long pants, as it can be transmitted to humans. Thorough handwashing is also recommended after treating the animals. Not only is it important to treat the animal, it is important to disinfect pens and anything with which the infected sheep or goat may have been in contact. For exhibitors, it is important to treat blankets, grooming stands, clippers, combs, trailers and any equipment that may have been in contact with a potentially infected sheep or goat with an effective fungicide after each show.



The small circular area on the goat where hair loss has occurred and appears crusty is ringworm. Photo courtesy of Chelsey Kimbrough.

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