THE WOOD VETERINARY GROUP

Nematodirus watch!

Having worked incredibly hard to get lambs safely on the ground and turned out onto spring grazing, it is vital that we do all we can to promote growth rates and lamb survival to weaning.

Nematodirus battus is an internal gut worm which can cause significant disease in lambs. Disease can significantly compromise daily liveweight gain and can cause a high mortality rate. Sudden death of lambs is the main clinical sign, along with lambs that have watery, green diarrhoea and which look/feel to have lost condition. These signs are seen after the mass synchronous hatch of eggs has occurred, which requires a period of cold weather followed by warm weather. The hatch then occurs 7-14 days after the rise in temperature making it easier to predict when we will see issues. Not all lambs will be at risk from Nematodirus and risk must be assessed on a case by case basis.

Worm egg counts are not useful for monitoring Nematodirus as disease is caused by developing larvae attacking the small intestine. Egg counts spike well after disease has occurred and once the developing larvae have become egg laying adults. Ewes are not affected by Nematodirosis as immunity is gained after an animals first grazing season.

Assessing risk

1. **Are your lambs at risk?**

Lambs will be at risk if they're grazing pastures that kept lambs this time last year and if they're old enough to be starting to eat grass i.e. 6-12 weeks. If ewes are a bit short of milk or suffering from mastitis, then these lambs will be eating more grass earlier (from 5 weeks old) and so the risk will be sooner. These criteria must coincide with a recent cold spell followed by warm weather.

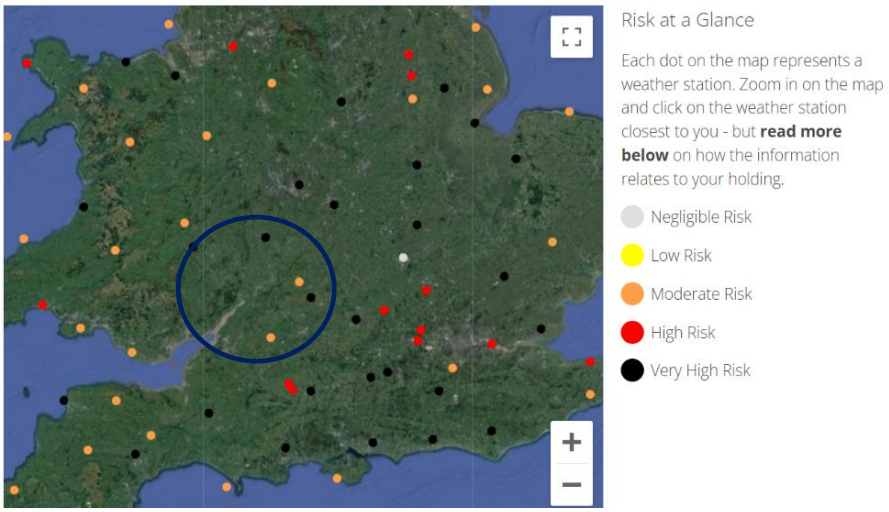
2. **Determine the level of risk and when hatching is likely to occur**

The NADIS Nematodirus forecast is a very useful tool to assess the risk to this year's lambs, which is calculated based on many factors. Each field on your farm will have a different level of risk and this will depend on the following points:

- History of the field – infection passes from last year's lambs to this year lambs, so if there was a lamb crop on that pasture at this time last year, lambs on that field this year will be at high risk
- Altitude of the field – every increase of 100m above sea level causes the hatch to occur around a week later
- Aspect of the field – eggs on south facing fields will hatch earlier

Use the nearest weather station on the map as a guide and then alter this risk depending on the altitude, aspect and history of the fields you're currently grazing lambs on.

The dots seen around the Gloucester area are coloured orange and black, therefore the risk is moderate to very high.
The black dots (very high risk) are from weather stations well below 100 metres above sea level, therefore if your farm is at this altitude, then lambs could be at significant risk and will need addressing now.
The orange dots (moderate risk) are from weather stations well above 100m above sea level, so if your farm is around this altitude then hatching is likely to occur in the next 7-14 days.



3. **Take action!**

- Avoid infection by moving lambs off high-risk pastures on to low-risk fields or new leys before the high-risk period – if they are on the pasture during the risk window then treatment is a must
- If lambs cannot be moved, treatment should be with a white drench (a benzimidazole product) as this product is effective against Nematodirus and is of little use for the rest of the year for other gut worms due to wormer resistance
- Remain vigilant! White wormers have no persistency of action and so treatment may need to be repeated 2-3 weeks later if lambs are still significantly at risk. Clear wormers should not be used in the fight against this parasite and should be reserved for later in the summer months to treat specific worm burdens that are resistant to white wormers

4. **Monitoring worm burdens**

- After the Nematodirus risk has passed, start worm egg counting lambs for this season. These should be performed every 4-6 weeks to guide worming decisions, or sooner if growth rates are less than 200g/day or diarrhoea is seen

MSD Flock check scheme

We hope everyone is having/had a successful lambing period! However, if you did experience >2% abortion rate or had more than 2-3 ewes abort over a couple of days, then the MSD flock check scheme may be helpful to you. MSD are sponsoring blood testing for ewes to detect exposure to enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis. They will subsidise the blood sampling of 6-8 unvaccinated ewes which aborted or had weakly lambs. This scheme will run until 30th of June 2022 so get in touch with us at the practice if you would like to take advantage of this service.

Vaccinating lambs against Clostridial disease and Pasteurellosis

From 3 weeks of age, lambs need to be vaccinated against Clostridial diseases and Pasteurellosis. It must not be done any earlier than this due to the crossover of antibodies received from their mothers. These diseases will often target the best, fastest growing lambs in a group and often present as dead lambs so prevention is key. These cheap and very effective vaccines are easy ways to minimise lamb losses. There are currently some supply issues with some of these vaccines, so please get in touch with us at the practice so we can advise on the best options.