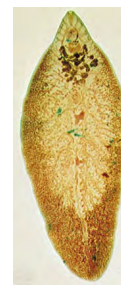
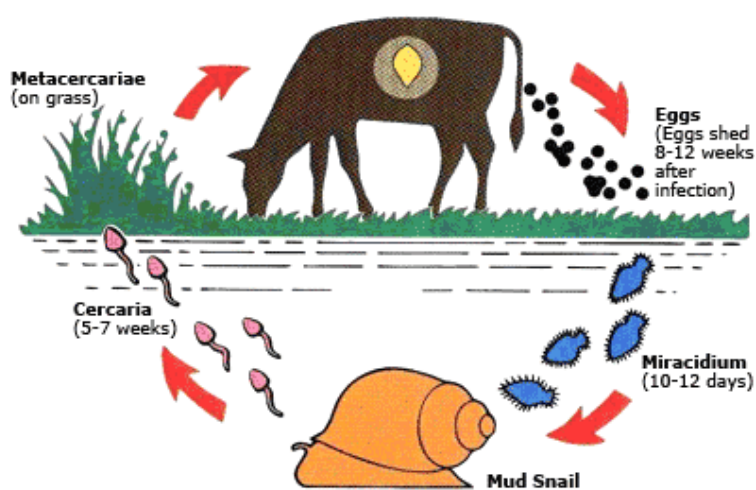


Liver Fluke

Liver fluke is a parasitic disease of both cattle and sheep. It is caused by tiny parasites ("flukes", *right*), which live inside the liver of the animal. They produce eggs, which are shed into the gut and out in faeces. Fluke are unlike other parasites (such as gut and lungworms) in that infection is not passed directly from one animal to another, but requires the involvement of another "intermediate" host (in the case of fluke a particular type of snail). Disease can either be due to:



- immature fluke migrating through the liver, which can rapidly lead to signs of weight loss and anaemia ("acute" fluke, seen mainly in sheep)
- presence of adult fluke preventing the liver from functioning properly, causing poor performance, diarrhoea and failure to thrive over a longer course of time ("chronic" fluke, seen in both cattle and sheep).



Liver fluke lifecycle (diagram courtesy of Merial Animal Health)

Liver fluke has traditionally been associated with grazing livestock on wet, low-lying land, as this is the preferred habitat of the snail host. In the past, the most common time for cattle and sheep to become infected has been the autumn, when there is high rainfall. The disease has then traditionally manifested itself in the late winter and early spring when the young flukes that were eaten in the autumn have matured and migrated to the liver, causing weight loss, poor growth and scour.

In many recent years, heavy rainfall has resulted in the spread of snails, and therefore liver fluke, into areas that would normally be too dry for them to survive, putting more animals at risk than usual. Exceptionally wet summers have also meant that fluke problems are often seen earlier in the year.

Options for management include submitting pooled faecal samples from a number of animals to check for fluke eggs (this requires adult flukes to be present, and egg shedding can be intermittent) or tactical preventative treatment with a flukicide drug. If you would like any further information relevant to your particular management system, please do not hesitate to contact the practice for advice.



Wet pasture is a typical snail habitat.