**Orf in Sheep and Goats**

Orf is a viral skin disease found in sheep and goats. Frequently seen around the time of lambing/kidding, it is commonly found around the nose/mouth of lambs/kids and can be spread to the udder of ewes/nannies through suckling.

Infections of Orf on the udder can be very painful and therefore may prevent lambs/kids being able to suck. The virus can be very contagious and may affect a large proportion of your flock/herd.

**How to recognise Orf**

Classic orf lesions look like raised warts and are most commonly seen around the nose and mouth of lambs/kids and on the udder of ewes/nannies. However infection may just be noticeable as scabs or blisters with reddening around the edges.

Other sites where orf can be found include:

- On the forehead of rams that are prone to fighting injuries
- Around the lower limbs and feet causing painful lesions and lameness
- Inside the mouth of lambs/kids, which can prevent them feeding.

Usually a diagnosis can be made on the appearance of these skin lesions, but in less straightforward cases fresh scabs can be collected and sent to the lab for further testing and confirmation of the diagnosis.

**Vaccination**

There is a live vaccine available for sheep, applied by scratching the skin of the leg. Vaccination in ewes should be done prior to when disease is anticipated but not in the last two months of pregnancy. Lambs can be vaccinated from birth and vaccination in the face of an outbreak has been shown to reduce spread of the disease between lambs.

Because the vaccine is a live vaccine, it should NEVER be used in flocks that have never experienced Orf, as it has the ability to infect individuals with the virus. Also, as a live vaccine it has a short shelf-life so careful storage is important.

There are currently no licensed vaccines for orf in goats, but your vet will be able to give you guidance on which vaccines could be used under licensing laws.

**Prevention and treatment**

Orf enters through damaged skin, so remove stock from pastures that contain thistles, brambles etc. that can cause damage to face and feet.

The virus can survive between outbreaks within buildings and on handling equipment so thorough cleaning and disinfection of buildings and handling equipment is of utmost importance in the control of orf.

Take care when buying in new animals, as this is often the cause of new outbreaks. Quarantining them for the first lambing period may be beneficial.

In many cases the skin lesions do not cause much distress to lambs/kids and they will self-cure in a few weeks.

As the disease is caused by a virus, no specific treatment is available. Pain killers can be beneficial and antibiotics are sometimes used if severe lesions have secondary bacterial infections.

- Ensure that infected lambs/kids or offspring with infected dams are getting enough milk.
- Consider offering hungry lambs/kids bottled milk in addition to the milk they get from their dams.
- Remember that the virus can be spread from lamb-to-lamb by teats and bottles, so careful hygiene of feeding equipment should help minimise the spread of disease.
- Inspect ewes/nannies for orf on the udder as a cause of malnutrition in lambs.

**Orf in humans**

Orf is one of the most commonly diagnosed zoonotic infections (infection spread from animals to humans) reported in the UK. Humans may catch the disease through handling sheep, feeding lambs, shearing etc.

Orf can cause localised red, swollen, painful lesions on the hands and face which can take a number of weeks to heal. Immunity to the virus is short-lived and so re-infection can occur.