

Club Lamb Fungus: A Problem for Everyone

“Club Lamb Fungus: is a highly contagious fungal infection of the skin of sheep. It was first diagnosed in 1989 and is not widespread in the sheep industry. It is an especially severe problem in show lambs. This is thought to be due to extensive contact between show animals, close clipping, and removal of protective lanolin from washing of show animals. Club lamb fungus is caused by a fungus called *Trichophyton*. In addition to show lambs, the disease also occurs in commercial and purebred sheep flocks.

Infected areas on lambs appear as tan, brown or almost black, crusty spots, usually with little or no wool in the center, that can occur on various areas of the body and last for several weeks. Infected areas may be single or multiple. Infected areas, or lesions, are almost impossible to detect unless sheep are closely shorn, as for the show ring. When healing begins to occur, wool begins to grow back into the infected areas, but the fungus may be present deep in the lesions for several weeks. It is extremely difficult to determine by visual examination when a lesion is completely healed and non-infective. The infection can be treated by various fungicides that are available from veterinarians, but complete recovery takes several weeks. Exhibitors should examine lambs carefully and on a continuous basis for evidence of infections. Have suspicious lesions checked by a veterinarian.

Club lamb fungus infection is easily acquired by direct contact with infected sheep or from contaminated clippers, blankets, combs, bedding, bunks, fences, and pens. Contact of lambs at weigh-ins and “jump-out” shows, along with loss of natural protection because of close clipping, washing, and covering with blankets, probably contributes significantly to the incidence and severity of the disease in show lambs.

Club lamb fungus causes a nasty “ringworm” infection in people. It causes acute inflamed areas that may result in scarring. The infection is more severe in young people than adults. Infection of the hands and arms is common in youth and adults who work with infected lambs. The potential for human infection raises concerns about contact with the public at shows and expositions. For this reason shows and expositions must develop rigorous inspection programs to keep infected sheep off the premises.

The following are suggested guidelines for handling evidence of club lamb fungus at 4-H and FFA shows. They will be adhered to at this year’s Iowa State Fair.

1. All sheep exhibited at the Iowa State Fair or district shows must be accompanied by a health certificate, signed by a veterinarian.
2. All show lambs must be slick shorn and re-inspected by a fair/show veterinarian during the check-in process. If the wool length is determined to be too long for careful inspection, shearing will be required before re-inspection can occur.
3. All sheep showing signs of infection with club lamb fungus shall be immediately removed from the grounds. Show veterinarians have been instructed to be very conservative relative to active versus inactive lesions. This is because inactive lesions still contain active spores.

4. Pens, chutes, gates, trimming benches, and all equipment that have been contacted by infected sheep will be thoroughly cleaned (scrubbed) and disinfected immediately.
5. Extension staff and show officials will discuss the disease and its control prior to the fair or show.

Club lamb fungus is an infectious, contagious disease and as such, is subject to the laws and rules for control established and enforced by the Division of Animal Industry of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

Please contact your County Extension Office if you have questions about this important matter.

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