



TEST IT: Suspected Scab In Your Flock? Test, Don't Guess

Why Is Testing Important?

If you have noticed symptoms that look similar to sheep scab, it's important not to immediately assume the cause of disease without a proper diagnosis. Sheep scab and lice can look very similar, but do not always require the same treatment. Treating based on clinical signs alone can mean using a product that is ineffective against the parasite present, allowing the problem to continue spreading through the flock. Lack of a proper diagnosis can also result in unnecessary treatment, increasing costs and adding to the risk of resistance developing.

Knowing exactly what you are dealing with means you can choose the most appropriate treatment and put the correct control measures in place from the start.

What Should My First Steps Be If Scab Is Suspected?

- Isolate sheep showing symptoms from the rest of the flock if possible- and keep any other animals that could have been in direct contact with these sheep away from any separate management groups you may have.
- Contact your vet about the most appropriate test to confirm whether sheep scab is present.
- Review potential risk factors that may have introduced sheep scab into your flock- such as recently purchased animals.

What Tests Are Available?

There are two tests available for sheep scab, either a skin scrape or a blood sample.

Skin Scrape

The edges of active lesions (in this case, abnormal areas that are inflamed and moist) on the skin surface of the sheep are scraped using a scalpel by a vet. Wool samples may also be taken. The specimens are examined microscopically to visually inspect them for mites. This test is most useful when there are obvious symptoms of disease present, however, the test will not identify animals in the early stages of infection.

Blood ELISA Test

Blood samples can be taken to test for antibodies that have been produced in response to infection with mites. This test is much more reliable than the skin scrape, and can also detect infection from 2 weeks post infection. Therefore, it can be a useful test to use during quarantine on purchased animals, to reduce the risk of sheep scab entering your flock. This test can detect sheep scab before clinical signs are seen.

A minimum of 12 sheep need to be tested per management group in the flock- no matter the size- this ensures that infection will be detected at the earliest stage.

What Do My Results Mean?

A positive result confirms that mites are present, and appropriate measures will need to be put into place. A negative result should always be considered alongside the clinical signs, with consideration of the test used and timing of sampling. Where possible, any purchased animals should be quarantined for at least 28 days, and ideally, blood sampled after two weeks (so that adequate time is given to allow antibodies to develop following possible exposure at market or during transport).

*Using the correct treatments for sheep scab will be discussed in next week's article- **TREAT IT.***



Animal Health & Welfare NI
Sheep Scab
AWARENESS MONTH
Spot it. Test it. Treat it. Stop it.

TEST, don't guess, for sheep scab.

Skin Scrape

Looking for the physical presence of mites.
Can be inaccurate in the early stages of infection.

ELISA Blood Test

Detects antibodies produced as a response to infection.
Can detect infection as early as 2 weeks post-infection.
Very useful for testing during quarantine.



**SAVE MONEY AND
LABOUR, AND PLAY
YOUR PART IN
REDUCING
RESISTANCE TO
TREATMENTS BY
TESTING**