

Keeping the Flock Healthy – Sheep Diseases

- ★ As species, sheep are much better adapted to life on hills (their natural habitat).
- ★ Therefore, keeping them on lowland farms causes health conditions that would not otherwise arise.
- ★ Specifically, lowland sheep suffer more from maggots, internal parasites and footrot.
- ★ The main reasons these conditions arise on lowland flocks are climate and stocking rate.
- ★ Maggots are prevented on hills because the harsh conditions simply do not allow them to thrive.
- ★ Footrot is controlled on farms because sheep's hooves are naturally stronger due to more use and wear.

1. ***Maggots / Fly Strike***

- ★ Maggots are the larvae (young) of the **blowfly** or the **Green Bottle Fly**.
- ★ The fly is attracted to odours in the fleece, and they lay their eggs on dung-soiled wool.
- ★ Fly strike can be prevented by
 1. Dipping in the Summer
 2. Trimming excess wool around the tail
 3. Tail docking
 4. Grazing management (to prevent scour)
- ★ An affected sheep is usually quite restless and scratches the affected area frequently.
- ★ The area may appear green and wet.
- ★ Maggots should not be ignored and can often be fatal!

2. ***Worms***

- ★ Nearly all sheep carry intestinal parasites / worms.

- ★ The older / more mature the animal the less worms.
- ★ This is because older animals develop a certain immunity to worms.
- ★ Why do ewes follow lambs, and not vice versa?
- ★ Worms can only be controlled effectively with both drugs and good pasture management.
- ★ All sheep should be dosed regularly and pastures managed as top prevent the spread of worms.

3. *Liver Fluke*

- ★ This is a “flat worm” which can cause death to sheep or simply reduce thriftiness and lower the quality of the carcass.
- ★ Both worms and liver fluke **cannot** reproduce inside the sheep (host) so the number of larvae eaten determine the extent of the disease.

4. *Footrot*

- ★ Footrot is a very serious problem on Irish Farms.
- ★ Footrot is caused by a bacteria, in fact many different types of bacteria.
- ★ Footrot causes lameness, serious pain, reduced food intake, in-activity and can lower fertility in rams.
- ★ You can spot an affected sheep by seeing them kneeling down while grazing.
