



# Controlling abortion in sheep



## General Precautions

- Remove aborted lambs, placentae and contaminated bedding. Dispose of them safely and disinfect.
- Isolate aborted ewes, ideally for 3 weeks but at least until vaginal discharge has ceased. Use disinfectant boot dips outside isolation pens.
- Do not foster lambs on to ewes which have aborted unless enzootic abortion (EAE) has been ruled out.
- Mark ewes which have aborted. Your vet may suggest blood tests for EAE and toxoplasma.
- Do not allow bird droppings to collect in feed troughs and vary the area used for ground feeding. Wildlife may carry bacteria such as salmonella and campylobacter which can cause abortion.
- Young cats are most likely to transmit toxoplasma. Discourage breeding cats. Keeping some neutered adults may deter strays.
- Send samples for diagnosis if 2% or more of ewes have aborted.

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**Please contact your nearest VLA regional laboratory for advice on tests and services available. Contact details can be found on the VLA website.**

### Contact details

VLA, Weybridge,  
New Haw, Addlestone,  
Surrey, KT15 3NB  
United Kingdom

**Tel:** 01932 341111  
**Fax:** 01932 347046  
**E mail:** [enquiries@vla.defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@vla.defra.gsi.gov.uk)  
**Web:** [www.vla.gov.uk](http://www.vla.gov.uk)

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## ● **Diagnosis**

- ◆ An accurate diagnosis is essential to guide decisions on treatment, retention and management of ewes. There can be more than one cause of abortion in a flock.
- ◆ Antibiotic treatment may reduce losses from EAE. In abortions caused by bacteria, antibiotics are not proven to be effective. In toxoplasmosis, treatment is unlikely to be of value in the current year.
- ◆ EAE is passed from ewe to ewe or ewe to lamb and infection will remain in the flock from year to year. Affected ewes should not foster ewe lambs intended for breeding.
- ◆ Toxoplasmosis is acquired from the environment, not from other ewes, and may not recur next year.
- ◆ After EAE and toxoplasma outbreaks, vaccination could be considered in future.
- ◆ In listeria abortions, attention to silage quality may be indicated.
- ◆ In salmonella outbreaks, housing is often heavily contaminated and lambing outside may be advised.

## ● **Human Health Risks**

Many agents causing ovine abortion can cause human illness. The following precautions should be used:

- ◆ Use gloves to handle aborted lambs and placentae.
- ◆ Wash hands.
- ◆ Pregnant women and immunocompromised people should not handle lambing sheep, new born lambs or the clothing used during lambing.

Contact your veterinary practitioner for further advice.