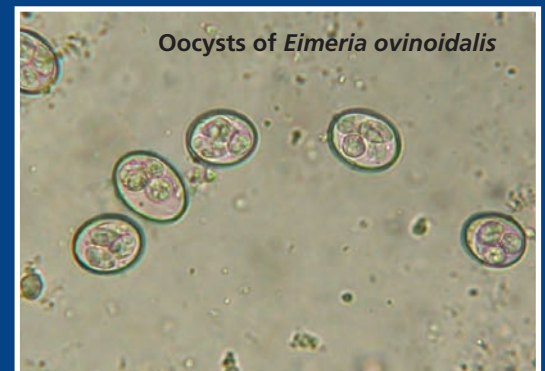




Veterinary
Laboratories
Agency®

Coccidiosis in sheep



Coccidiosis is a disease caused by a small protozoan parasite that infects cells lining the intestines of lambs.

The majority of those that infect sheep do little damage, but *Eimeria crandallis* and *Eimeria ovinoidalis* can cause disease if:

- The lambs are infected by parasites from contaminated surroundings.
- Infected lambs do not have adequate feed.
- Infected lambs are affected by cold or wet weather.
- Lambs have other infections e.g. nematodiosis.

Continued

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
Web: www.vla.gov.uk

● Life cycle

Lambs swallow oocysts (egg like organisms) from the environment (which may include the ewe's teats). The parasites multiply in the lamb and the oocysts are passed in the faeces and develop to the infective stage.

● Clinical signs

Diarrhoea (with or without blood), weight loss and death are typically seen in young lambs (4-8 weeks old) but diagnosing the disease is not simple. Twins or triplets are more often affected.

● Diagnosis

Oocysts can be detected by microscopic examination of faeces. However, this can be misleading as there are only two species of coccidia that produce disease. You can only be sure that coccidiosis is a problem if lambs are showing clinical signs, or there is a history of disease on the farm, or pathogenic species of coccidia are detected (which requires an extra test). Coccidiosis can also be diagnosed on post mortem examination. Sometimes lambs with diarrhoea do not have any oocysts in their faeces so, if symptoms persist, a second faeces sample at a later date may be required to demonstrate oocysts.

● Treatment

Ask your veterinary surgeon for advice. Treatment should be given at the first opportunity and to all the lambs at risk.

● Prevention

Lambs infected with small numbers of this parasite can develop immunity and not suffer disease. To prevent disease:

- ◆ Avoid overcrowding.
- ◆ Keep bedding as clean and dry as possible (coccidia survive best in moist conditions).
- ◆ Avoid following-on young lambs behind older lambs when at pasture, as the older ones multiply the infection and the younger ones will be exposed to large numbers of coccidia.
- ◆ Ensure lambs have sufficient colostrum and nutrition.
- ◆ Discuss chemical methods which may aid prevention with your veterinary surgeon.

Contact your veterinary practitioner for further advice.
