

Footrot

Impact

- One or more feet on many sheep (at any age) can be affected in recurring years.
- Footrot can cause lameness, weight loss, poor wool growth and quality, poor fertility and flystruck feet.
- Foot symptoms can progress from:
 - red and moist skin between the toes (benign or virulent footrot); to
 - minor lifting of the hoof horn off the heel (benign or virulent footrot); to
 - complete lifting of the horn off the heel spreading to lift from the sole to the outer wall of the hoof and the toe (virulent footrot).
- Footrot must be declared on a National Sheep Health Declaration if moving into NSW or within SA.
- Footrot is notifiable to a government veterinary authority in ACT, NSW, Queensland, SA, Victoria and WA.

Likelihood

Footrot can start with one infected foot on one sheep. Footrot is more likely if sheep are purchased without a footrot declaration on a National Sheep Health Declaration or have been on agistment, in contact with straying stock or in shared facilities. In the early stages, footrot can be confused with foot abscess, but a good rule of thumb for distinguishing between the two conditions is that footrot can affect more than one foot, whereas abscesses usually only affect one foot. If more than 10% of the flock infected this is also a red flag.

Benign footrot is also known as scald or non-progressive footrot and, although caused by mild strains of the same bacteria as virulent footrot, only causes mild lesions. Virulent footrot is when the bacteria rapidly under-run and separate the hoof horn from the foot.

Footrot spreads or worsens when the foot loses its natural defenses against infection due to:

- bacteria type (benign, intermediate or virulent);
- an animal's variation in immunity; or
- an average daily temperature of 10°C for 4–5 days and enough months of moisture at foot level to weaken the skin and horn.

Strategic prevention

Seek professional advice on a quarantine program and risk factors for introductions. If biosecurity is compromised, get advice on footbaths and antibiotics.

Things to consider to limit the risk of footrot coming onto your property include:

- limit sheep and goat entry into flock or property.
- assume all introductions need to be quarantined.
- seek National Sheep Health Declarations when buying sheep.
- limit the number of sources of purchased sheep and buy on-farm.
- develop a stray sheep agreement with neighbours.
- implement good transport hygiene.
- seek sheep and goat footrot property history if buying cattle.
- in cool conditions, quarantine stock for 3–4 weeks provided this period includes 4–5 days with an average daily temperature of at least 10°C and sufficient moisture at ground to keep feet wet.
- in warm conditions, a quarantine period of seven days is recommended.
- if infected sheep have used common facilities/lanes, leave for seven days before use by clean mobs or use portable facilities.

Tactical response

Seek professional advice on control or eradication of virulent footrot and control of benign footrot.

Seek professional advice when detecting red/wet skin between toes (when temperatures are above 10°C) or if paring a misshapen hoof reveals pus or lifting horn.

Also seek professional advice on your responsibilities if you suspect footrot, as it is a notifiable disease in some states.

Tips for managing footrot include:

- Diagnose early to limit spread.
- Eradication options:
 - Destock for 2 weeks.
 - Cycles of inspect feet, treat (vaccine if available, footbath, antibiotics, dry weather), cull, inspect.
- Control options:
 - Antibiotics.
 - Frequent paring and footbathing (walk through or standing).
 - Testing to understand what type of footrot is present and how useful a vaccination strategy is likely to be.



TIPS AND INFORMATION

- Prevent footrot through biosecurity and biocontainment.
- If suspected, seek fast diagnosis and control or eradicate.

Resource links

[AWI Footrot](#)

[MLA Footrot](#)

[State and Territory Notifiable Animal Disease lists](#)

New South Wales

[Footrot in sheep and goats](#)

[Footrot: A guide to identification and control in the field \(NSW version\)](#)

South Australia

[Footrot in sheep](#)

[Footrot: A guide to identification and control in the field \(SA version\)](#)

Tasmania

[Lameness in sheep and goats](#)

[Footrot: A guide to identification and control in the field \(Tasmanian version\)](#)

Victoria

[Footrot in sheep](#)

Western Australia

[Managing virulent footrot in sheep](#)