

Scrapie Information Leaflet

Scrapie is a fatal brain disease of sheep and goats for which there is no treatment. There are two forms of Scrapie, Classical and Atypical.

About Classical Scrapie

- Classical Scrapie develops very slowly. Affected sheep show no signs of infection until the condition is advanced
- Classical Scrapie is normally confirmed after death by examining affected brain tissue
- Classical Scrapie usually affects ewes and rams from 2 to 5 years old
- Classical Scrapie can cause significant economic losses in the flock and affects trade in sheep and sheep products
- Classical Scrapie is a notifiable disease. There is a DARD slaughter and compensation scheme
- Classical Scrapie has been present in sheep flocks in the British Isles for over 200 years and has never been associated with any public health risk

Clinical Signs of Scrapie (Affected animals may show some or all of these signs)

- excessive, repeated rubbing of head and body
- fleece discolouration and wool loss
- nibbling legs
- teeth grinding
- change of temperament
- loss of weight and body condition
- head and body tremor
- unusual gait, leg weakness and death

Signs of Scrapie may be seen at any time of the year but stress, such as lambing, can bring on the symptoms.

Spread of Classical Scrapie

Usually only one or two animals in a flock will show symptoms at any one time. Infection is normally spread at lambing time and can survive in pens and on pasture. It is resistant to most disinfectants. Scrapie spreads slowly and infection can remain in the environment for a long time. It can be difficult to eradicate from affected flocks.

If Scrapie is suspected on your farm

Signs of Scrapie should not be ignored. The condition is legally notifiable and a significant welfare problem. You must immediately inform your local Divisional Veterinary Office or Scrapie Section ☎ 028 905 25275.

A DARD Veterinary Officer (VO) should visit within 48 hours to examine the suspected sheep.

If the VO suspects Scrapie

- The animal must be kept on the premises
- The VO will arrange for the slaughter and disposal of the animal
- The amount of compensation that will be paid will depend on whether the animal is affected with Scrapie or not
- The local DVO must be told if the animal dies. In that event, the carcass must be surrendered to DARD on request by the VO

Compensation

Where Classical Scrapie is confirmed the compensation is £30 for a cull animal and £90 in any other case. Where Scrapie is not confirmed, compensation will be £30 for a cull animal, £90 in any other case; **or** where evidence is provided by the owner, the market value of the animal up to a maximum of £400.

Reducing the risk of Classical Scrapie in your flock

Certain genes provide for an increased risk of contracting Classical Scrapie. Testing a blood sample from a sheep will show whether the sheep is likely to be susceptible or resistant to Classical Scrapie. This is known as genotyping.

Flock owners can change the genetic profile of their flocks by breeding for resistance to Classical Scrapie. Animals with a susceptible genotype should not be used for breeding. It is recommended that replacement breeding rams are genotyped before purchase or use.

Genotyping will help you make decisions about your sheep breeding programme.

About Atypical Scrapie

A new form of scrapie has been detected in recent years, which is distinct from Classical Scrapie. This form is called Atypical Scrapie. It causes similar clinical signs and is also a notifiable disease. Genetic susceptibility differs from that in Classical Scrapie cases. There is no scheme currently for breeding resistance to Atypical Scrapie. There is limited information on how the disease is spread but good biosecurity measures may help reduce the risk. Similar to Classical Scrapie, DARD will instigate a monitoring programme on flocks with cases of Atypical Scrapie.

Further information on Scrapie is available from the local Divisional Veterinary/DARD Direct Office.