



Keeping Ovine Johne's Disease out of a Flock

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Monica Kelly, Camperdown

A few simple precautions will significantly reduce the risk of ovine Johne's disease (OJD) entering a flock.

Avoid purchasing infected sheep

The greatest risk of introducing OJD into a flock comes from the introduction of infected sheep. Introduced sheep may initially show no obvious signs of OJD but may be shedding the bacteria in their manure.

The best way to minimise the risk of introducing OJD is to maintain a closed flock. However, if purchasing sheep, the risk can be minimised by purchasing from low-risk flocks.

The ABC Score

Under the Assurance Based Credits (ABC) Scheme, every mob of sheep in Australia has an ABC Score. This score indicates the risk that sheep may have OJD. The higher the ABC Score, the lower the risk that the mob has OJD. Purchasing sheep from flocks with a higher ABC score means the risk of introducing infected sheep is minimised. (Refer Agriculture Note: *Assurance Based Credits (ABC) Scheme and the Sheep Health Statement*).

Victoria is divided into two Prevalence Areas.

1. **Low prevalence Area.** The following shires are situated in Victoria's Low Prevalence Area: Swan Hill, Mildura, West Wimmera, Glenelg, Yarriambiack, Horsham, Gannawarra, Buloke and Hindmarsh. Owners of flocks in these shires can claim 4 credit points in Category A of the ABC score (unless the flock is infected or suspect to be infected).
2. **Medium Prevalence Area.** The remainder of Victoria is a Medium Prevalence Area and owners of flocks can claim 2 credit points in Category A of the ABC score (unless the property is infected or suspect to be infected).

Flocks that have undergone testing (eg SheepMAP flocks) or commenced vaccinating against OJD will have a higher ABC Score, as they can also claim credit points towards the ABC score in Categories B (testing), C (vaccination) and/or D (certified low risk).

Sheep Health Statements

Always ask for a Sheep Health Statement (SHS) when purchasing sheep. A SHS requires the vendor to disclose the ABC score of his or her flock. These statements are mandatory in Victoria for mobs of non-slaughter sheep that originate from flocks that are infected or suspected to be infected and for any mobs of sheep that have an ABC score of less than two.

The use of these statements is voluntary for other flocks for sheep movements within Victoria but most states require sheep from interstate to be accompanied by a SHS.

Persons making false or misleading statements on a SHS may be liable under Fair Trading legislation and the Stock (Seller Liability and Declarations) Act 1993.

Avoid introducing OJD by other means

OJD-causing bacteria can also be introduced into a flock in other ways:

Boundary fencing and strays

Owners should make every effort to maintain boundary fencing and gateways in order to minimise the risk of straying sheep.

Collect stray sheep and work with neighbours – don't just put sheep back over a fence. Check mobs and paddocks regularly for strays.



Figure 1: Ensure fences are sheep-proof

Shows and sales

Precautions to minimise risk of infection with OJD at shows or sales should be observed. (Refer Agriculture Note: *Ovine Johne's disease guidelines for shows and sales*).

Other species

Other animal species could spread OJD. Grazing or handling goats and deer separately from sheep is generally recommended, unless there is demonstrated low risk (eg: participation in market assurance programs).

Movement of manure

Boots and equipment carrying manure have the potential to spread OJD-causing bacteria. Precautions should be taken to minimise this risk.

Run-off from neighbouring properties may carry OJD-causing bacteria into previously uncontaminated paddocks. Diversion drains, double-fenced tree lines, or running cattle in these paddocks may assist prevent infection in a flock.

Sheep transports and shared facilities

Ensure transports are thoroughly washed before loading with replacement sheep.

If possible, do not share common stock-handling facilities.

Grazing contaminated land

The bacteria that cause OJD may survive in the environment for 12 months or more. Producers should consider the risk that land may be contaminated with

bacteria prior to purchasing or leasing land, or agisting stock off-farm.

Vaccination

Owners of all sheep flocks should consider whether they should be vaccinating their flock against OJD.

Factors they should consider include their type of enterprise, whether they run a closed flock, sources of purchased sheep, and the risk posed by neighbouring flocks (ie fences and drainage).

It is important to keep in mind that vaccination does not provide complete protection from infection. Vaccinated sheep may still become infected and shed OJD-causing bacteria, allowing spread to other stock. This highlights the importance of ensuring other biosecurity measures are in place.

Further information

Further information about OJD can be obtained from animal health staff at your nearest DPI office or on the DPI web site: <http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/farming/OJD>

Acknowledgement

The original author of this note was Richard Keys, and the previous version was published in September 2006.

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