



As a vet in practice a common question asked in May is “My lambs are scouring – what should I treat them with?” The answer of course is “It depends what is causing the problem”. This is not a tongue in cheek answer! The clinical presentation of many of the common causes of parasitic scour are very similar. The most common causes include nematodirus and coccidiosis.

The Department of Agriculture issued a nematodirus warning for the first and second weeks of May depending on location. Last week we had several outbreaks of nematodirus in the practice. Paddocks that were grazed by ewes and lambs last year are the highest risk. Lambs aged between 6-12 weeks of age are most susceptible especially twins and triplets or those from ewes with poor milk supply. Why? These lambs are eating a higher proportion of grass than young lambs or singles. Lambs over 12 weeks are likely to have a degree of immunity built up. One farmer lost a number of lambs and was disappointed to hear the laboratory diagnosis of nematodirus as he had dosed the lambs on April 14<sup>th</sup>. Essentially this intervention was too early as the hatch had not occurred. In 2017 a dose on April 14<sup>th</sup> was correct, in 2018 this should have been delayed until May 7<sup>th</sup>.

Coccidiosis is also common at this time of year. Paddocks that are contaminated with coccidial oocysts will cause disease and ill-thrift in lambs 6-12 weeks of age. Young lambs have a degree of immunity from colostral antibodies. One farmer client had very high levels of coccidia in faecal samples combined with nematodirus, and had suffered losses. Again he had blanket treated all his lambs with a coccidiostat when leaving the shed. The issue on this farm is that the coccidiosis is being picked up by the lambs in the paddocks and not the shed so again the intervention was too early.

Both these farmers were being proactive in preventing disease in their lamb flocks and had spent a considerable amount of money on preventative treatments. In both cases this expenditure had to be repeated and both had suffered lamb losses and ill-thrift.

Parasite control plans must be farm specific and year specific to be effective. Getting this right means taking the correct advice from a veterinary professional with intimate knowledge of your farm, following a risk assessment of grazing practices on the farm. An effective parasite control plan will reduce losses, ill-thrift and avoid the need for repeat treatments resulting in higher output and reduced labour on farm.