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Newsletter

June 2026

Death of Young Lambs Following Inhalation of Mineral Drenches – *Pam Brown*

We've had word from SRUC that they have diagnosed inhalation of mineral drench as the cause of death in 3- to 4-week-old lambs a couple of weeks ago. This has become a regular feature of late spring and early summer in recent years. Usually it is 6- to 8-week-old lambs that are affected following handling for multiple management tasks. These can include administration of anthelmintic and mineral drenches, clostridial and/or orf vaccination, tagging, castration/tailing and application of pour-ons. Lambs that inhale mineral drench develop laboured breathing and die very rapidly within 15 to 30 minutes of being handled. Others will die over the next 24 to 48 hours and losses commonly run into double figures.

Lung changes can be subtle and easily confused by postmortem change, but they may have a mottled appearance. Histopathology at a lab is required to confirm the diagnosis and shows acute airway necrosis consistent with recent inhalation of an irritant substance.

Please flag this issue to your staff and remind them to take care when administering oral mineral drenches to young lambs in order to avoid unnecessary deaths. It would also be an opportunity to review whether administration of anthelmintic or mineral drenches is required at that time, using faecal egg counts (ideally 15 per group) and blood samples (usually 5 per group). Please speak to us if you would like any further advice.

Nematodirus Alert

Nematodirus risk remains high across much of the region, with the latest SCOPS forecast at the end of May indicating high to very high challenge levels. We are also seeing Nematodirus eggs in faecal worm egg counts (FWECs). However, it is important to remember that FWECs are not the most reliable indicator of early Nematodirus disease risk, as the greatest damage is caused by immature larval stages before eggs are produced. As a result, lambs can become severely affected before eggs are detected in samples.

Nematodirus is a disease of lambs and generally doesn't affect adults. Eggs survive over winter on pasture and hatch the following spring when weather conditions are favourable, particularly following periods of rain and sunshine.

Key risk factors include:

- Lambs old enough to be consuming significant amounts of grass (typically over 6 weeks of age).
- Grazing pasture that carried lambs the previous year.
- Groups already affected by coccidiosis.
- Suitable weather conditions for mass hatch.
- Additional stress factors such as poor ewe condition, triplet lambs and nutritional challenges.

Good risk assessment, preventative management and prompt treatment remain the best ways to reduce the impact of Nematodirus outbreaks. This involves:

- Using the SCOPS forecasts regularly to assess local risk levels.
- Where possible, avoid grazing young lambs on pasture grazed by lambs the previous season.
- Treat at-risk lambs with an appropriate white drench.
- Check treatment efficacy with a faecal egg count around 10 days after dosing.
- Continue monitoring worm burdens throughout the grazing season using regular faecal egg counts.

The UK Lambing Survey 2026

Just a reminder that the UK Lambing Survey 2026 is still running.

Led by the University of Nottingham and supported by organisations across the sheep sector, the survey looks at key challenges such as disease pressures, vaccine availability, weather impacts and flock performance.

The results will help build a national picture of lambing practices and pressures, and will directly inform future guidance on flock health, welfare and responsible medicine use.

The survey is anonymous and takes around 10-12 minutes to complete.

Pasture Management and Grazing Strategies on UK Farms Survey

Researchers from the University of Glasgow, Moredun Research Institute and James Hutton Institute are inviting UK farmers to take part in a PhD study exploring pasture management and grazing strategies.

The project aims to better understand how different grazing practices affect worm control, livestock productivity and pasture quality, while gathering farmers' views on sustainable farming and what works best on their land.

There is a short 15–20 minute survey to complete, from this group some will be invited to take part in on-farm studies. A pilot in 2026 and a greater amount of data collection in 2027 involving faecal, soil and grass sampling is the plan. Participation is voluntary, all information will be anonymised, and free faecal egg count results will be provided to participating farms.

Please look at the survey information for your farm's eligibility to take part.

Teaser Tups

Spring has drawn to a close and our thoughts turn to preparing for breeding again. One of the ways we can do this is by preparing teaser tups, or vasectomised rams, to tighten lambing periods or bring lambing a little earlier.

- **When to vasectomise** - At least 8 weeks before the teaser is to be used.
- **Choice of tup** - Shearling tups tend to be more effective but ram lambs can be used if needed. When selecting tups they should have a good body condition score (3.5-4/5) as well as unbroken teeth and no signs of lameness.
- **How to use a teaser** - For optimal effects keep ewes away from sight, smell and sound of any tup for at least a month before using teasers. Use one teaser per 50-100 ewes. Introduce the teaser to leave with the ewes for 14 days before swapping to a stock tup. As a higher number of ewes will be cycling together, it is recommended to put out one breeding tup per 20-30 ewes when using teasers.
- **What else to do** - get your breeding tups fertility tested to ensure once the teasers come out they are ready to work (we usually start fertility testing tups from late August onwards).

Don't Forget to Use!

- **Clostridial and Pneumonia vaccinations** - Ovivac P/ Heptavac P in lambs, for both Pasturella pneumonia and clostridial disease.
- **Fly prevention** – Clik Extra, Clikzin, Crovect, Dysect on sheep to prevent blowfly strike. Swish or Spotinor to prevent fly problems in cattle.
- **Boluses and injections** to prevent trace element deficiencies.
- **Baycox/Vecoxan and wormers** – For treatment of coccidiosis, and worms, respectively when required.