



## Monitoring worm egg counts in your flock

Ineffective worm control can lead to poor growth rates, loss of body condition and even deaths. Regular faecal worm egg counts can be useful to:

- Inform decisions on whether a group of sheep require treatment
- Check if a treatment has been effective

Parasite control is crucial to achieving the best growth rates in lambs and maximising the performance of a flock. However using wormers as we have in the past, without evidence of the need for treatment, is no longer sustainable given the increasing levels of resistance of the worms to the drugs available. This can make adopting good practice seem complicated as veterinarians and advisors are no longer able to prescribe a one method fits all solution to tackle worms.

At HiHealth Flockcare we advocate monitoring of worm egg counts on dung samples and our vets can take the time to discuss how this might be employed in your flock to avoid wasting time and money using drugs that may not be needed or may not be effective.

The most cost effective way of monitoring egg counts is to submit individual dung samples from 10 sheep selected at random in a single management group. These will be weighed and pooled at the lab for a single worm egg count.

Collecting dung samples is straightforward and can be done by holding the group of sheep in a corner of a field for a few minutes then collecting fresh faeces once the sheep have been allowed to move away. Samples of about a tablespoon from each of 10 animals should be collected in grip seal bags or screw lidded tops.

Regular worm egg counts will allow treatments to be targeted at the times they are needed rather than waste treatments in sheep that have no evidence of significant worm burdens. Making a choice as to the most appropriate anthelmintic to use will also be easier if the efficacy of treatments is known.

There are 5 classes of wormer, and although the first 3 are the most widely used, the 4-AD and 5-SI have an important role in worm control and in protecting the effectiveness of the widely used class 3 anthelmintics particularly.

The timing for collecting samples after worming to check if treatment has been effective varies depending on the class of anthelmintic used. The table below gives the number of days after treatment for collection of faecal samples for faecal worm egg count testing.

Wormer class	Number of days after treatment for sample collection
1 – BZ, benzimidazole ‘white’ drenches	14 days
2 – LV, levamisole ‘yellow’ drench or injectable	7 days
3 – ML, macrocyclic lactone ‘clear’ drench or injectable	14 days
4 – AD, amino-acetonitrile derivatives ‘orange’ drench	14 days
5 – SI, spiroindoles ‘purple’ drench	14 days

There are other reasons that wormers may appear to have failed to work including poor storage of medicines, using out of date products, under dosing (which is common when bodyweight is estimated), poor drenching technique or the drench gun not administering the volume it is set to deliver, which can result in under or over dosing.

Other actions to protect against anthelmintic resistance in your flock are outlined in the SCOPS principles and include:

- Quarantine treatment of purchased sheep
- Use weigh scales and always dose for the heaviest sheep in a group
- Use wormers only when necessary by carrying out pre and post treatment checks on dung samples

There is much more information about sustainable control of worms and this can be found at [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk)

Please contact us for additional advice on groups and numbers to test on an individual flock basis and how best to investigate suspect anthelmintic resistance in your sheep.