



# FLY-STRIKE FACT SHEET

## A Fact Sheet for the Canadian Sheep Industry

Dr. Melissa Moggy

### Fly-strike

Fly-strike occurs when blowflies lay eggs in wounds, infected skin, moist wool, or wool that is heavily stained with feces. Once the eggs hatch, the maggots will begin to eat the surrounding flesh. The maggots cause painful wounds that can progress to secondary infections, blood poisoning, and may lead to death [1, 2]. Common locations for fly-strike include [3]:

- Hindquarters around the anus
- Wounded areas from shearing, predation, or head wounds in males
- Around the feet of sheep with footrot
- The back of sheep with wet wool

Sometimes fly-strike is difficult to see until the wool has been spread to expose the skin. Signs of fly-strike may include [1]:

- A small damp spot
- Irritation or scratching
- Biting or rubbing the hind end
- Difficulty keeping up with the flock

Once identified, fly-strike must be treated promptly. Treatment usually includes cleaning the infected area, removing the maggots, and antibiotics may be needed [2].

The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep outlines guidelines regarding fly-strike treatment and prevention [Figure 1].

### Weather

Warm and humid weather is a major factor in the development of fly-strike [1]. During this time, producers should closely monitor their flock for signs of fly-strike.

### CODE REQUIREMENTS

- Sheep affected by fly-strike must receive prompt treatment
- Producers must understand the basic biology of the blowflies that cause strikes
- Producers must determine the relative risk of fly-strike based on:
  - Predisposing environmental factors
  - Predisposing sheep traits
  - Relative risk factors (dags and long tails; wet wool in warm, humid conditions; footrot; open wounds)
  - Seasonal preference for blowflies
- Producers must take steps to reduce the attraction of flies to sheep:
  - Consider the risk of fly-strike in the risk/benefit analysis to tail dock
  - Preventing diarrhea or treating it quickly if cases do occur and crutching accordingly
  - Cleaning and treating wounds quickly
  - Shearing animals before fly season
- Monitor flock for fly-strike as soon as fly season begins and during prolonged damp and humid weather

### CODE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Be aware of advances in fly-strike control and treatment options
- Consider implementing a baiting system for specific fly species

National Farm Animal Care Council, 2013

Figure 1: Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep Regarding Fly-Strike [1]

### Diarrhea

Prevent or treat diarrhea as soon as possible to avoid soiling the hindquarters and attracting blowflies. Producers are encouraged to work with their veterinarian to develop a parasite control strategy to avoid diarrhea in their flock [1].

## Crutching

Crutching is the removal of wool from around the tail and between the rear legs to remove or prevent feces-soiled wool that can attract flies [1]. Mulesing, the removal of the skin around the rump, is a painful practice and is not acceptable in Canada [1].

## Fly Control

Controlling the fly population is an excellent prevention strategy. Remove deadstock, afterbirth, and waste to avoid attracting flies. Treating wounds quickly will prevent infection that could attract flies [3]. Finally, fly-traps can be used to significantly decrease the incidence of fly-strike [4].

## Tail Docking

Tail docking is thought to decrease the incidence of fly-strike by decreasing feces soiling of the wool. Methods include rubber rings, hot-iron, crush and cut, and surgical removal [1].

Tail docking is a painful procedure and can cause chronic pain from nerve tissue growth at the docked end of the tail [5]. If producers decide to tail dock their sheep, they are encouraged to speak to their veterinarian about pain control [1].

The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep outlines guidelines regarding tail docking sheep [Figure 2].

## CODE REQUIREMENTS

- The decision to tail dock must be based on a welfare risk/benefit analysis rather than as a routine; the basis for this decision should be part of the flock health and welfare plan
- Tail docking must be performed by, or under the direct supervision of, competent personnel using proper, clean, sanitized, and well-maintained tools, and accepted techniques
- Producers must monitor for signs of post-operative complications and take appropriate corrective action
- Tail docking using a surgical technique must be done by a licensed veterinarian with anesthesia and analgesia
- Rubber rings must not be applied beyond 6 weeks of age
- Docked tails must cover the vulva in ewes and the equivalent length in rams. Tails must be docked no shorter than the distal end of the caudal fold

## CODE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Tail dock using rubber rings should be performed between 24 hours and 7 days of age
- Use the hot iron method when and where ever possible
- Administer pain relieving drugs when and where ever possible
- Consider performing tail docking and castration at the same time

National Farm Animal Care Council, 2013

Figure 2: Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Sheep Regarding Tail Docking [1]

## References:

1. National Farm Animal Care Conference (NFACC). 2013. Code of practice for the care and handling of sheep. Available at: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/sheep>. Accessed: 04/24/17.
2. Alberta Lamb Producers. Guide to Parasites in Sheep. Available at: <http://www.ablamb.ca/images/documents/factsheets/Guide-To-Parasites-In-Sheep.pdf>. Accessed: 04/24/17.
3. Alberta Lamb Producers and Alberta Goat Breeders Association. Sheep and goat management in Alberta – Health. Available at: [http://www.ablamb.ca/images/documents/management-modules/sgma\\_health\\_module.pdf](http://www.ablamb.ca/images/documents/management-modules/sgma_health_module.pdf). Accessed: 05/01/17.
4. Broughan, J.M. and Wall, R. 2006. Control of sheep blowfly strike using fly-traps. *Vet Parasitol.* 135(1):57-63.
5. French, N.P. and Morgan, K.L. 1992. Neuromata in docked lambs' tails. *Res Vet Sci.* 52:389-390.

✉ High River PO Box 5201  
#5 112 Centre Street  
High River, AB T1V 1M4

☎ 403-652-5111  
FAX: 403-663-3035  
🌐 [www.afac.ab.ca](http://www.afac.ab.ca)

📍 Alberta Farm Animal Care  
🐾 @AbFarmAnimal



Advancing Responsible Animal Care