

The Shearer's Role in Reducing Disease

By Dr. Anne Lichtenwalner, DVM; and Dr. Richard Brzozowski, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

For information about UMaine Extension programs and resources, visit extension.umaine.edu.
Find more of our publications and books at extensionpubs.umext.maine.edu.

General concepts

The information provided in this fact sheet is common sense and much of it you probably already know. But after reading this, you may develop a careful, systematic approach to avoiding the spread of disease. This will help promote your professional status as a shearer and keep your clients happy. When shearing, you will handle every animal and you have a greater chance to see problems the owner may not have seen. Add value to your service by following these suggestions.

Prevent problems

1. Be ready to clean and disinfect equipment. Bring a clipper disinfectant, a general disinfectant, long handled brush, tub and an adequate supply of water. Bring disposable examination gloves, and plastic trash bags for responsibly disposing of waste. Bring an extra set of clean coveralls for each farm to be visited.
2. If possible, sort sheep by age so you work from youngest to oldest. This way, you shear those most likely to be healthy first. This lessens the chance of spreading disease.
3. Sort out sheep with any signs of illness, such as coughs or "lumps" (possible abscesses) so you can handle them last. These abscesses might be due to caseous lymphadenitis (CL), and it is easily spread from sheep to sheep via the clippers. Bring marking crayons so sheep with lumps can be easily identified.
4. Trimming hooves, too? If you see reddened skin between the toes, or deformed, smelly or bloody feet, this could be foot scald or foot rot. Disinfect hoof trimmers after every sheep trimmed.
5. With rams, check the scrotum and the prepuce for lumps, uneven testicle size, flystrike, etc. Let the owner know if you find a problem.



If you find problems

1. Skin lumps could be abscesses, and sometimes they are due to CL. CL is not curable, and culling affected sheep is recommended due to its tendency to spread once present on a farm. If you find a lump while you are shearing, mark the sheep and isolate it, so the owner can consider what to do with it. **DISINFECT** your equipment and hands immediately after handling animals with abscesses.
 2. Try not to rupture any abscesses. If a lump ruptures and drains, **STOP AND DISINFECT** your equipment and hands. Discharge from the lump should be contained, bagged in plastic, and incinerated. If you can, put on clean coveralls before handling any more sheep.
 3. Advise owner to separate out all sheep with abscesses, and consider laboratory diagnosis (blood test or culture of unopened abscesses).
-

Teachable Moments: As a shearer, you will likely experience situations in which you will be asked for advice. Be prepared to provide sound advice on topics such as body condition scoring, foot rot, mastitis, pizzle rot, CL and more. Consider carrying contact names and numbers or web sites for veterinarians or small ruminant specialists. Some shearers keep a portable file of useful fact sheets for clients. Cooperative Extension is a helpful resource for this information.

Time between farm visits

If you can, try to schedule a day without any animal contact between farm visits. This allows any viruses or bacteria that might be on your vehicle, equipment, clothing or self to die (because there are no sheep to support them). **If you have to visit more than one farm in a day:**

1. **Clean the vehicle:** Be careful about disinfection between flocks. You also want to protect your own animals using good biosecurity practices. Start with good boot disinfection **BEFORE** you get back into your vehicle. Boots should be washed, then enclosed in a clean plastic bag before they are put in the vehicle. After leaving a farm, or before entering a new one, wash tires using a hose and drain (a gas station may be useful). Use a long handled scrub brush and soap up the tires, then rinse them well. Better yet, simply go through the car wash.
 2. **Clean clothes/coveralls:** Change into a clean shirt, gloves and coveralls between farms. Put dirty clothes into a plastic sack and launder separately from other clothing after each farm visit. Remember, dryers at the high setting are effective at killing ticks or bacteria on clothing.
 3. **Clean footwear:** Mud and manure carry germs: be sure to remove it! Make sure you have “driving shoes” and also your workboots in the vehicle. Change into the clean workboots before getting out of the vehicle when you arrive at the farm. When done, be sure the dirty boots don’t contaminate the inside of the vehicle. If your shoes or moccasins are leather/fabric, at least brush them off and use a spray such as Lysol to disinfect. Never bring dirty boots onto a farm.
 4. **Clean hands:** If you work bare-handed, wash your hands well, and keep a hand sanitizer in your vehicle for use when there aren’t good hand washing facilities provided.
-

A Footwear Protocol with Biosecurity in Mind: When visiting farms for shearing, be prepared with at least two sets of footwear. Use clean driving shoes in traveling to farms. Carry your clean shearing shoes or moccasins in a sealable plastic bag within reach of the driver’s seat. When arriving, change your footwear in the vehicle before setting foot on the ground. Keep your driving shoes in the vehicle. When leaving the farm, follow a reverse protocol by removing barn footwear and placing them in a sealable plastic bag. Then put on your driving shoes for your trip home.

Who you bring

Make sure all assistants follow a safe and biosecure protocol. You're responsible for their actions on the farm.

Dogs are an essential part of working sheep, but be sure that they don't act as vectors of disease. Dogs working with sheep should be wormed for tapeworms every 2 months, as sheep can become infected with several kinds of tapeworms from grazing near dog fecal material that carries tapeworm eggs. Dogs can also become infected with tapeworms by eating uncooked sheep intestines/offal. Those tapeworms can cause human disease, too. Keep your dog under your control or at home.

Equipment

Shearing equipment may carry disease causing bacteria and ectoparasites such as keds or lice from sheep to sheep. The bacteria that causes caseous lymphadenitis, or CL, can be spread by non-disinfected clippers and shears. It's vital to disinfect the equipment between farms, and best to disinfect between sheep.

Handling sheep

Shearing is hard work, though an excellent shearer makes it look easy. The less trauma to the animal, the less chance of disease transmission. The quieter and more relaxed the animal, the easier your job will be, too.

After you shear

Clean and disinfect your equipment as you put it away. Put coveralls into plastic bags or plastic bins for cleaning later. Remember to wash the tires or whole vehicle after you leave the farm. It may be a good idea to stop by the carwash between farms.

Selecting and using disinfectants

1. Nicks on sheep: tamed iodine ("Betadine") solution
2. Bleeding hooves: untamed iodine (7% iodine) and blood-stop ("styptic") powder
3. Deep cuts: may need sutures and antibiotics (owner/vet); you can clean with betadine
4. Boots/vehicle: dilute bleach solution (10 tablespoons bleach per gallon of water)
5. Clippers: Clippercide or similar bactericidal spray designed for clippers
6. Laundering clothing: regular, HOT water washing and DRYING at the "high" heat setting will kill viruses, bacteria and parasites. This is also very effective against ticks and fleas in animal bedding.

Other: Nolvasan™ (chlorhexidine) solution is generally effective, but don't overdo the use of disinfectants when simple washing and drying will do.

Be prepared for possible injury

Carry a well-supplied first aid kit for yourself or helpers. At a minimum, such a kit should include antiseptic, bandages or varying sizes, antibiotic salve, eye wash bottle, pain reliever and material for tourniquets or slings.

Information in this publication is provided purely for educational purposes. No responsibility is assumed for any problems associated with the use of products or services mentioned. No endorsement of products or companies is intended, nor is criticism of unnamed products or companies implied.

Call 800.287.0274 or TDD 800.287.8957 (in Maine), or 207.581.3188, for information on publications and program offerings from University of Maine Cooperative Extension, or visit extension.umaine.edu.

The University of Maine does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, including transgender status and gender expression, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status in employment, education, and all other programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Director, Office of Equal Opportunity, 101 North Stevens Hall, 207.581.1226.