

# Clinical presentation of scour often similar

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A common question asked of me during 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 six to 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 14 April. Essentially,

this intervention was too early, as the hatch had not occurred. In 2017, a dose on 14 April was correct; in 2018, this should have been delayed until 7 May.

Coccidiosis is also common at this time of year. Paddocks that are contaminated with coccidial oocysts will cause disease and ill-thrift in lambs six to 12 weeks of age.

Young lambs have a degree of immunity from cloistral 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 with a coccidiostat when leaving the shed.

The issue 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 trying to prevent 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 suffered 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 knowl-

edge 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.

Conor Geraghty runs Geraghty & Neary Veterinary, a three-vet large-animal practice in Mountbellew, Co Galway, a member of XLVets, a group of progressive practices working together to achieve a better future for agriculture and veterinary in Ireland. See [www.xlvets.ie](http://www.xlvets.ie).