

Sheep lice:

Causes and treatments



Causes

Lice can be easily introduced to a property by purchasing new sheep (rams, ewes or trade lambs) or stray sheep. It is always advisable to either keep newly purchased sheep separate until they can be shorn and treated. Inspect any stray sheep for lice before returning them to their owner, especially if they have mixed with your sheep. Ensure stock proof fences are a key part of your biosecurity plan.

Consequences

Sheep lice infestations can significantly impact productivity. They can reduce fleece weight and lead to wool defects such as yellowing and coting, which result in discounts at sale. Lousy sheep also tend to perform poorly due to the irritation caused by lice bites – spending more time itching than eating – which can lead to lower body condition scores.

Ewes with lice can pass them onto their lambs, which may also suffer reduced performance. Affected lambs spend more time scratching than feeding, and their growth may be further compromised by reduced milk supply from their underperforming mothers.

Do shedding sheep get lice?

Yes, shedding sheep do get lice. There is no value in the wool from these shedding breeds, however, sheep lice can lead to production losses and devaluing the skin.

They can also spread to other wool producing sheep which impacts their profitability.

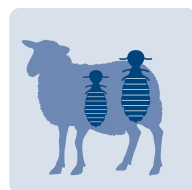
How do lice spread?

Lice spread primarily through direct contact between sheep, as they rarely survive for long in the environment without a host. Each livestock species has their own specific lice and are not transferable e.g. cattle lice to sheep. Flock infections can be caused by introduced infested sheep such as stray sheep or new purchases, or ineffective treatment.



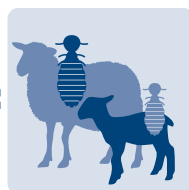
Shows light lice infections in dark wool sheep.

Sheep lice impact production and ultimately reduce the profitability of the sheep enterprise.



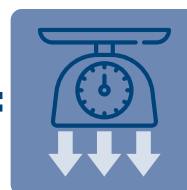
sheep infected with sheep lice

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ewes pass lice onto lambs

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eating less, reduced weight gain

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slower growing lambs

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wool is damaged

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For more information visit
pir.sa.gov.au/animal-health or
call the Emergency Animal Disease
Hotline on **1800 675 888**

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5 reasons sheep get lice

Reason	Causes of sheep lice
Buying in sheep	• Check National Sheep Health Declaration states free of lice • Inspect sheep for lice • Keep newly purchased mobs separate from the rest of your sheep, monitor to see if lice develop (especially if purchasing freshly shorn sheep).
Stray Sheep	• Remove stray sheep from mob & inspect stray sheep for lice and quarantine • Contact stray sheep owner, inform strayed onto your property • Ensure stock-proof internal and boundary fences.
Lice treatment application	• Rotate chemical groups around to minimise lice resistance • Treatment options include an oral drench, backline, jetting or dipping. • Follow the label recommendations, especially for dose rate to body weight & application equipment is working correctly, treat all ewes & lambs (if lambs on at treatment time).
Mis-mustering	• Ensure all sheep are mustered and treated for lice at the same time.
Shearing	• Ensure sheep are cleanly shorn • Ensure no long wool tufts remaining can be lice harbouring sites, wool tufts influence backline product efficacy • Keep shorn and treated sheep separate from unshorn and non-treated sheep.

Treatments

Sheep lice can be treated in several ways. When sheep are shorn this removes most of the sheep lice as they don't like being exposed to heat, cold and sunlight. Directly after shearing a backline can be applied. Sheep can be dipped around two weeks after shearing once all the cuts are healed up. Electronic jetting machines are available which apply the product while the sheep walk through a race. An oral drench is available which can be applied in short and long wool sheep. It is important to rotate chemicals and follow the label instructions.

Handy hints

- Shedding sheep can get lice
- Sheep can have both grass seeds & lice
- Rotate lice treatment chemical groups
- Muster all the sheep, don't leave any behind
- Ensure your boundary fences are stock proof
- Some chemical groups require clearly shorn sheep for treatment.

PIRSA assistance

Check your sheep for lice before selling or moving them. Sheep without lice are healthier and perform better than those with lice. If you're unsure whether your sheep have lice or want to report stray sheep with lice, contact your local Animal Health Officer. Their contact details are available on the PIRSA website

pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/animal_health/contact_us

PIRSA animal health staff can provide:



Correct diagnosis



Lice management advice



Lice treatment advice



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