



Sheep Scab in Northern Ireland

Transmission of the disease

The sheep scab mite (*Psoroptes ovis*) can affect sheep of all ages. Not all sheep may show signs, however some can have a chronic infection lasting up to 2 years. The mite does not affect humans and is rarely found on cattle.

Transmission – how the disease spreads

Sheep scab can spread in two ways: directly and indirectly.

- Direct transmission means that the mite spreads from animal to animal, for example, from one animal in a group to another or from a ewe to her lambs.
- Indirect transmission means that the disease spreads by contact with a contaminated item. While mites live on sheep for their whole lives, it is known that they can also survive for up to 17 days in the environment, so for example, wool tags on fencing can be a source of infection.

Locations where transmission may occur

- Common grazing
- Grazing of sheep at other locations (due to exposure to mites in the environment if infected sheep were present within the previous 17 days)
- Direct contact with sheep from other flocks – for example, at boundaries, during break ins or break outs
- Purchase of apparently health sheep that carry the mite
- Markets or shows
- Transport (lorries, trailers)
- Feeding troughs, fencing
- Common handling facilities (yards, pens)
- Shared use of equipment – for example, at shearing or scanning where hygiene procedures have not been sufficient to prevent mites being carried from one farm to another.

There are other factors that may increase the likelihood of an animal contacting the sheep scab mite or that may affect the timing of disease transmission, such as a high stocking density, at tugging, scanning or shearing times.