

At this time of year, the major parasites of concern for young lambs are **Nematodirus** and **Coccidia**.

Coccidiosis

Coccidiosis symptoms

Coccidiosis can result in profuse diarrhoea that can be dark or even blood stained, with straining and weight loss. If left untreated the disease can be fatal. Even if treated, severe disease may result in damage to the gut, which prevents the lamb from thriving.

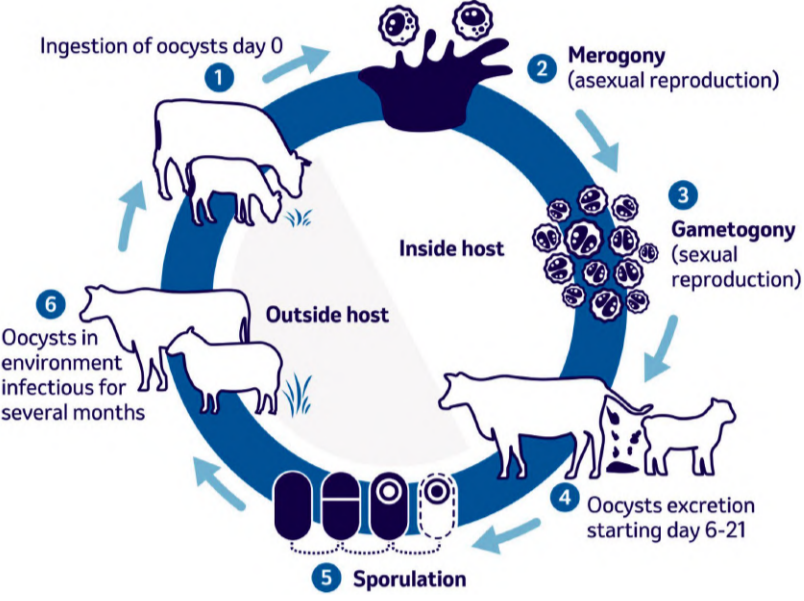
The parasite is transmitted by the faecal-oral route, and coccidia oocysts require moisture to become infective. Older lambs can shed large numbers of oocysts into the environment even after they develop immunity and can be a significant source of contamination for younger lambs in the flock.



How do sheep become infected with coccidiosis?

Contaminated water and feed troughs, and the skin of dams' udders are common routes for the spread of coccidiosis and infection is by the **faecal-oral route**: once oocysts (eggs) are passed out they can be eaten by the same or new animal.

As a rule, whilst adult animals may be the initial source of infection, heavy contamination comes from naïve lambs/calves themselves which, after contracting the initial infection, can go on to excrete millions of oocysts into their environment. Subsequent groups of naïve young animals then entering that same environment are exposed to a far higher challenge and are far more likely to suffer significant gut damage, production losses and disease.



How the damage is done?

As it progresses through its life cycle this parasite reproduces within the cells that line the gut causing the cells to rupture and damaging the villi (finger like projections that increase the surface of the gut to maximise absorption of nutrients). Young animals initially acquire a degree of immunity against coccidiosis from antibodies absorbed from colostrum when born. As this initial protection wanes, lambs become particularly susceptible to infection - most commonly between 4 to 8 weeks of age.

This damage reduces the amount of nutrients absorbed, causing ill health, poor growth rates and leaving them susceptible to other diseases. However, the obvious signs of disease (such as diarrhoea) do not appear until after a significant level of damage has already happened, leading to reduced growth rate and economic loss.



<https://sheepproducts.ie/>

Symptoms of coccidiosis

In general, animals with high burdens of infection or low levels of resistance, especially young animals will display clinical signs.

The clinical signs of coccidiosis are:

- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea (from green and slimy to bloody)
- Dehydration
- Straining – which can lead to rectal prolapse
- Abdominal pain
- Wasting
- Death

The damage to the gut allows for secondary bacterial infections to occur.



Treatment

Treatment can be in-feed or more commonly by drenching with products containing either diclazuril or toltrazuril.

The timing of treatment is important and lambs should be treated 1-2 weeks before expected disease. Lambs treated with diclazuril may require repeat treatment approximately 3 weeks after the first treatment as this drug has no residual activity.