

CHOOSING A SUMMER (or AUTUMN) DRENCH- WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK?

from Sheepvet Australia 1800 651 226

Why drench in summer?

- Strategic drenching sheep in summer used to be regarded as an effective way to control winter worms. It was supposed to remove adults at a time when there was little or no pickup of larvae from the pastures. This was supposed to reduce contamination of pastures at the break of season in autumn. However, it is no longer the recommended strategy because summer drenching has been one of the major factors leading to widespread resistance to drench chemicals among worms.
- In districts where late spring and/or summer rainfall is common, barbers pole worm (*Haemonchus contortus*) is likely to be a significant problem, and it may be necessary to treat affected animals over summer. It may be an occasional problem elsewhere.

Do the sheep require drenching in summer?

- It is now known that previously recommended general strategies (such as rotating drenches, adequate dose rates and summer drenching) have all failed to provide long-term and sustainable control of worms, and may have contributed to the rapid emergence of resistance.
- The only reason to drench sheep during summer is if worms are causing loss of production.
- Worms causing problems at this time of year may be:
 - winter worms carried over from the previous spring,
 - barbers pole worm (numbers build up very rapidly at this time of year) leading to anaemia and 'bottle-jaw', or
 - thin-necked intestinal worm in young sheep which may have been grazing close to the ground in late spring or early summer.
- In deciding whether treatment is needed, the trick is to:
 - Monitor or measure the number of worms in each mob (usually by a worm faecal egg count carried out by your veterinarian), OR
 - Monitor sheep for signs of barber's pole infestation (swelling under the jaw as anaemia develops), OR
 - Respond to seasonal conditions known to precipitate a worm problem such as summer rains or an extended haying-off period in late spring.
- If summer drenching is not essential, always delay routine treatments until early to mid autumn, depending on the district.

How do I choose the appropriate drench?

- When drenching in summer or autumn it is essential to choose a drench which is highly effective (preferably >99%) against the TARGET worm species.
- The most appropriate drench is not necessarily the most expensive or the latest chemical or combination.
- There is widespread resistance to all drench chemical groups among winter parasites in southern Australia, including to the 'mectin' group of drenches, particularly ivermectin.
- The major summer worm *Haemonchus* (barbers pole) is also now resistant to many chemicals.
- The only way to correctly choose a drench is to know the resistance status of your farm by having your veterinarian perform a resistance test (usually in spring using lambs).
- Abamectin and moxidectin remain effective against winter parasites on many farms although resistance to either of these may occur from repeated use in summer. Unfortunately, *Haemonchus* is likely to be resistant to both of these in some districts.
- Resistance to other simple drenches (white, clear and combination) is now so widespread that these are not effective enough against many winter parasites to be used for summer-autumn drenching on most Australian farms.
- However, levamisole (clear) remains effective against both *Haemonchus* & *Nematodirus* (thin-necked intestinal worm) and may be the treatment of choice for either of these parasites.
- Some of the newer combinations may be effective but the additional cost of using these is not justifiable on many Australian farms. However, naphthalophos (*Rametin*) with combination (fenbendazole + levamisole) is particularly useful as an alternative to abamectin or moxidectin or in an annual rotation with these effective 'mectins'.