

NEPHRITIS

KEY MESSAGES

1. Nephritis refers to inflamed or damaged kidneys.
2. Nephritis can cause reduced growth rate, weight loss and/or death.
3. Prevention is focused on marking hygiene, nutrition and weed management.

What is nephritis?

Nephritis is the term used to describe inflamed or damaged kidneys. Kidneys that have been recently inflamed or damaged can appear swollen, discoloured or spotty. With prolonged damage they may appear shrunken, irregular and scarred.

What is the cause?

Nephritis can occur from a variety of factors including:

- Bacterial infections - often associated with mulesing/marking wounds or rumenitis (secondary to grain poisoning/acidosis)
- Poisonous plants such as soursobs, lesser loosestrife, sorrel, pigweed, lantana, buffel grass and oaks (acorns)
- Toxins
- Over drenching, some antibiotics

Condition on-farm

As kidneys have a large reserve capacity, it may be that little effect is seen on-farm. More severe nephritis can result in reduced growth rate, weight loss and/or death. Sheep suffering from chronic kidney failure may display ill-thrift, pale gums, increased urination and sporadic deaths.

Condition picture in abattoir

If kidneys are found to show signs of nephritis, they will be condemned. In rare cases if the whole carcass is displaying the effects of kidney failure, such as the accumulation of fluid in tissue, the entire carcass will be condemned.



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Treatment

Treatment varies depending on the cause, severity and expression of the disease. Further investigation of the cause is the first step. Sheep should immediately be moved (slowly) from known toxic plants should this be identified as the cause. Veterinary attention should be sought if there are sick animals.

Prevention

- When marking and mulesing, practice good hygiene and management to reduce the risk of bacterial infections by using sharp, clean equipment, preventing wound contamination by avoiding wet/muddy/dusty conditions and avoiding overcrowding.
- Ensure any rations fed are correctly balanced to provide adequate quality, quantity and digestibility, and that they are introduced slowly.
- Prevent the introduction of weeds by purchasing feed from a known source, sowing certified seed and quarantining newly purchased sheep for 7 days in case they may be carrying weed seeds.
- Practice weed control and grazing management to maintain competitive pastures and minimise the risk of toxic weed consumption.
- Dose to the weights of the animals receiving drenches and antibiotics, and drench strategically using worm egg counts (see ParaBoss for more information).



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