



The monthly Producer edition of the **WA livestock disease outlook** provides a brief overview of recent significant cases investigated by Animal Health Laboratories (AHL).

Recent significant cases submitted to AHL

Case data from February to March 2014

White muscle disease in weaner sheep

- Multiple cases of white muscle disease due to vitamin E deficiency in sheep have been reported in the past two months. In one case in the Southern Agricultural Region:
 - deaths, ill-thrift and collapse were investigated in a flock of 3000 weaners grazing barley stubbles
 - blood tests showed very low vitamin E and muscle samples examined under the microscope were abnormal, confirming vitamin E deficiency.
 - the flock had been routinely drenched with vitamin E one week earlier but the dose was probably inadequate to treat the deficiency.
- Read more on [vitamin E deficiency in sheep](#), including treatment and dosage information.

Crownbeard toxicity in sheep

- A case of deaths in sheep in the Northern Agricultural Region was investigated:
 - 20/250 weaners and ewes died suddenly when moved to a lupin stubble paddock containing crownbeard
 - some deaths continued and weaners developed scouring and 'bottle-jaw' (fluid swelling beneath jaw)
 - an affected ewe and weaner were autopsied and had a large amount of clear fluid around and within the lungs, which is a sign consistent with crownbeard poisoning
 - the weaner also had changes consistent with lupinosis and parasitism and these conditions were probably also contributing to the signs in the weaners.
- Crownbeard is known to occur from Dongara to Northampton. Stock with no previous exposure to the plant crownbeard and with limited feed alternatives are most susceptible to poisoning.
- Read more on [crownbeard](#).

Ergot poisoning in sheep

- A case of neurological signs, deaths and hyperthermia (excessive body temperature) in sheep was investigated in the Northern Agricultural Region:
 - Merino weaners were ill-thrifty and had signs of hyperthermia such as standing in shade or in water troughs or dam and open-mouth heavy breathing on driving
 - severely affected sheep were lying down unable to rise or developed tremors when attempting to stand
 - the sheep were grazing stubble and pasture and being fed a mix of home-grown grain
 - a sample of the mixed grain had an ergot concentration of less than 0.02% (the maximum safe level for livestock feed), but as ergots can move in the silo at a different rate to the grain, pockets of grain may have contained a toxic dose of ergots.
 - ergot poisoning was diagnosed based on history of ergot exposure and the presence of hyperthermia (the most common sign of ergot poisoning in WA).
- If sheep show signs of a high temperature, it is important that producers contact a veterinarian to investigate as some exotic diseases, such as sheep pox and bluetongue, may first present as a high temperature. Early detection and diagnosis of an exotic disease is vital to reduce its impact on the industry.

Pregnancy toxæmia (twin lamb disease) in ewes

- A case of neurological signs in sheep was investigated:
 - late-pregnant Merino ewes grazing dry ryegrass developed blindness, staggers and were lying down unable to rise
 - the autopsy findings from two sheep and blood test results supported pregnancy toxæmia as the cause
 - as part of the TSE surveillance program, scrapie was ruled out by examining the brains of the sheep under the microscope. The farmer received a rebate of \$200 for participating in the program and the veterinarian also received a rebate in to assist with the cost of the investigation.
- Read more on [pregnancy toxæmia of ewes](#) and the [TSE surveillance program](#).

In autumn, be on the lookout for ...

Disease	Typical history and signs
Metabolic disease in ewes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pregnancy toxaemia (twin lamb disease) and hypocalcaemia (milk fever) often affect lambing ewe flocks at this time of year and have similar signs but different causes.• Hypocalcaemia can also occur after stressful events or in sheep grazing cereal regrowth or high-oxalate pastures.• Read more on pregnancy toxaemia and hypocalcaemia of ewes.
Salmonellosis in stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most common in intensively farmed livestock.• Causes profuse diarrhoea. Sheep may be found dead and pregnant ewes may abort.• Stress, high stocking density and faecal contamination in water supplies are common precursors to an outbreak.• Read more on salmonellosis of sheep.
Ergot alkaloid poisoning (ergotism) in stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ergots are part of a fungus that forms in seed heads, particularly ryegrass.• If stock eat grain contaminated with ergots they may develop ergotism.• Common signs of ergotism in WA are hyperthermia (excessive body temperature) and reduced production.• Remove affected stock from the ergot source, provide shade and water and consider using water sprays to reduce body temperature.• Ergot levels in feed should be less than 0.02% of feed by weight.• Ergots may concentrate in the last 20% of grain in the silo. Recheck grain for ergots when the grain is fed out (ergot resembles mouse faeces) and monitor stock for signs of ergotism.
Water quality issues for livestock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dams with low water levels may have high salinity and/or bacterial contamination.• In warm weather, growth of blue-green algae may be a problem.• Tanks and containers used to hold or cart water must be cleaned properly to prevent stock poisoning from contaminated water.

For more information about these diseases, contact your private veterinarian or DAFWA veterinary officer.

If you notice any unusual signs of disease in your stock or have unexpected stock deaths, contact your private veterinarian, DAFWA veterinary officer or the Emergency Animal Disease hotline on **1800 675 888**.

Why is being prepared for a national livestock standstill so important?

If foot-and-mouth disease were found anywhere in Australia, our livestock export markets would close immediately and not be restored until trading partners were confident that we were free of the disease. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) estimates that a large-scale outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease could cost Australia up to \$52 billion over 10 years.

The first key weapon in fighting the spread of foot-and-mouth disease and making it faster and less expensive to eradicate is a national livestock standstill.

The Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (DAFWA) is working with industry to enhance Western Australia's preparedness to implement and communicate a livestock standstill as part of a national program called Exercise Odysseus. As a key stakeholder in the livestock industries, please take the time to increase your knowledge about what a livestock standstill involves by:

- taking DAFWA's five-minute [national livestock standstill quiz](#) and
- reading the [national livestock standstill](#), [foot-and-mouth disease](#), and [Exercise Odysseus](#) webpages.

For more information about how a national livestock standstill would be implemented, email nls@agric.wa.gov.au or contact Peter Gray on 9368 3551.

We welcome your feedback. To provide comments or to unsubscribe, email katie.webb@agric.wa.gov.au.

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