



# Farm Vet News

Endell Farm Vets

Endell Vets Smallholders Club

April 2021

## FLUKE 101

### What is Fluke? (AKA *Fasciola hepatica*)

When you leave a worm egg count sample with us, you typically only expect a result for the number of gut worms. Additional worms can be identified if requested, such as Fluke, which resides in the liver of cattle, sheep and goats.

#### HISTORY

In the UK, fluke infections are on the increase. This may be partly down to climate change, as the parasite thrives in wet and warm environments.

This parasite grows in the liver, with the adults reaching 3cm in size. Once matured, the adults begin laying thousands of eggs into the bile ducts which travel through the intestine and onto the pasture.



#### LIFECYCLE

Once the eggs are passed out in the faeces, they hatch. A common UK snail (*Galba truncatula*) is needed in its lifecycle, as the egg must enter the snail to change into a form which can infect sheep, cows and goats. These snails are commonly found in rivers and water meadows, which is why we see high levels of fluke in animals grazing near water and cases are rare when hills are grazed. The snail stage requires warm temperatures to develop, therefore infection typically occurs between spring and autumn.

Once back on the pasture, these cysts are ingested by our animals and the young larvae travel through the liver, causing damage, as they develop into the large adults. This process takes approximately 10-12 weeks until the mature adults will start laying eggs to repeat the lifecycle, explaining why we see a variety of clinical signs, depending upon when they are infected and how severely.

#### WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR

The disease is seen in several forms, this means that the signs can be very broad. They range from sudden death and abdominal pain, to chronic weight loss and poor fleece quality. These signs could be shown by a large variety of diseases, it's therefore important to be aware of what the risk is of your animals getting fluke and reduce any risks by minimising their contact with natural water sources where possible.

#### IS IT FLUKE?

Identifying a case of fluke can be tricky, veterinary advice should be sought if you are concerned as diagnosing fluke will require an understanding of your animals' management, the signs they are showing, along with any testing, such as blood sampling and fluke egg counts.

#### Fluke Egg Counts

Fluke egg counts are best used to identify chronic cases (long term infections), as the young larvae can cause damage and disease before any eggs are produced.

#### TREATMENT

If after reading this you are concerned that your stock are grazing high risk land, please ring our office on 01722 333291 to speak to one of our vets, as prevention and treatment of fluke relies heavily on the use of Flukicidal treatments. The product choice and frequency of use will depend several factors, including:

- Time of year
- Level of fluke on the pasture
- Management/husbandry of your animals

