



## » **Making Vaccine Choices**

Vaccines are valuable tools to prevent and control disease. However, vaccines are available for only a few of the potential diseases affecting sheep. Many other sheep diseases can be controlled by preventing initial introduction, by sanitation, by isolation of sick animals and by culling chronically ill animals. Farmers and ranchers should develop their vaccination program in consultation with their veterinarian and take into account the disease problems in their flock and those common in their area. Excessive vaccine use without a plan can be expensive and ineffective.

Some disease causing organisms are present in most sheep flocks across the United States. A good example is the spore-forming bacteria that cause bloody scours and overeating disease or “enterotoxemia” in lambs. Vaccination for *Clostridium perfringens* types C and D can be recommended for most flocks to prevent these diseases. Likewise, *Clostridium tetani* spores are common in many sheep environments and may cause tetanus when they contaminate wounds. Properly timed vaccination of ewes can help protect lambs from these diseases.

According to the most recently available statistics from the National Animal Health Monitoring System, over 50 percent of U.S. sheep flocks had experienced abortions in the three years preceding the survey. Most of these were caused by infectious agents, and the most commonly diagnosed were *Campylobacter* (vibriotic abortion) and *Chlamydia* (enzootic abortion). Vaccines are available for these diseases and can be helpful in preventing and controlling them in flocks at most risk.

Other disease problems tend to be more regional.

- Anthrax and bluetongue are found only in some regions of the United States. Once anthrax has occurred on a property, the vaccine should be used for the next several years because the spores may persist in the ground for long periods. Vaccines for bluetongue are not available for all strains of the virus and do not give good cross protection between strains. So, farmers need to use diagnostic laboratory services to determine if a vaccine might be useful.
- Rabies occurs across the United States, but raccoon strain rabies has become a major problem in many eastern states. Sheep can be affected with rabies, and vaccines approved for sheep are available. Some states require sheep being exhibited to be vaccinated, and some flock owners can justify using the vaccine to protect their valuable genetics or possible human exposures.

Vaccines are available for contagious abscesses and soremouth – other common diseases of sheep. Consult your veterinarian for advice on use.

**OTHER USEFUL REFERENCES** | Health Chapter, Sheep Production Handbook, 2002 Edition and Sheep Care Guide, 2005 edition. Both of these are published by the American Sheep Industry Association. 

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