

Five-Point Check for Worms

BY MARISSA AMES

Indiscriminate deworming, either by deworming on a schedule or without seeing any specific symptoms of a high worm load, can breed medication-resistant worms on your property. Before deworming, conduct a five-point check to assess if treatment is necessary. This involves assessing the eye, back, tail, coat, and jaw areas.

1. Eye: Use a FAMACHA scoring system to determine level of anemia. Causes include nutrient deficiency, injury causing blood loss, or parasites. The most common parasites responsible for anemia include barber pole worm (most common and most deadly), hookworms, liver flukes, and both clinical and subclinical coccidiosis.

2. Back: Conduct a BCS (Body Condition Score). Causes of low BCS include age, neglect, diseases (such as Johne's disease), and many parasites including stomach worms, bankrupt worm, and both clinical and subclinical coccidiosis.

3. Tail: Check for diarrhea and fecal matter stuck to the tail and back end. Diarrhea can be due to changes in diet, viral or bacterial diseases, stress, or parasites including nodular worm and clinical coccidiosis. Assess level of soiling via a DAG scorecard.

4. Coat: Assess coat condition, luster, and thickness. Conditions causing a poor coat can include poor nutrition, mineral deficiencies, external parasites (mites, lice), and internal parasites such as barber pole worm, stomach worms, and both clinical and subclinical coccidiosis.

5. Jaw: Look/palpate for any swelling. Facial areas may swell due to insect/spider bites or stings, abscesses resulting from foxtails or feed material stuck in teeth/cheek, or caseous lymphadenitis. Bottle jaw has a distinct appearance, with fluid collecting in the intermandibular space of the lower jawbone. Deadly parasites causing bottle jaw due to anemia include barber pole worm (most common and most deadly cause), liver fluke, hookworms, and coccidiosis.

Fecal Float Tests

Since not all worms respond to all dewormers, or you may have known medication-resistant worms in your area, conduct a fecal float test to identify parasite load and species. Fecal float tests can be done with basic at-home equipment, via a veterinarian, or via a lab. Then consult with a local veterinarian regarding the right dewormer for your location and the worm species.

What Constitutes an Emergency?

Should you wait and see, or act now? These symptoms indicate a problem or emergency.

- FAMACHA score of 1 or 2 (white and palest pink). A score of 3 may be an emergency for that goat, if accompanied by other symptoms.
- BCS score of 1.0 indicates an emaciated and weak animal. Take action immediately to identify the cause and provide supportive care.
- DAG scores of 4 and 5 (severe soiling and watery diarrhea) indicate that treatment is recommended (4) and essential (5).
- Poor coat quality, including hair loss and skin problems, indicates a worsening problem that needs to be addressed, though it's usually not an emergency unless accompanied by other symptoms.
- Bottle jaw indicates extreme anemia which may quickly result in death if left untreated.

Sources: University of Maryland Extension Small Ruminant Program; goats.extension.org

