

Red Meat Development Programme

Footrot, top tips for treatment

latest research findings



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Controlling lameness is vital to all sheep farmers, both to optimise animal health and welfare and to reduce the impact lameness has on enterprise productivity.

A recent research project at the University of Warwick compared methods of treating footrot. The research found that a long acting antibiotic injection used in conjunction with a foot spray was the most effective treatment and that trimming of the hoof at any stage slows down the healing process.

It is important to correctly diagnose any cause of lameness before treatment to ensure that the chosen treatment is appropriate and cost effective.

The characteristic symptoms of footrot include inflamed skin between the digits (sometimes the only sign), separated horn, grey scum (see Figure 1) and a characteristic smell. If unsure, consult your vet.



Figure 1 – Day 1



Figure 2 – Day 14



Figure 3 – Day 40



Figure 4 – Day 63



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development: Europe Investing in
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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

The study

In the study, over 90% of the 53 sheep with footrot recovered within ten days when treated with a long acting antibiotic injection, an antibiotic spray (on the cleaned interdigital space), and importantly - NO TRIMMING of the horn. Recovery was much less successful when hooves were trimmed to expose the footrot lesion. Less than 30% of the sheep that had their feet trimmed, recovered within ten days.

Figure 1 shows an infected foot on day 1 when it was treated with antibiotic injection and antibiotic footspray. Figure 2 shows the same recovered foot after two weeks. Figure 3 and 4 follow the same hoof at day 41 and 63 after treatment to show the recovery which includes reattachment of the previously separated horn.

Why does antibiotic work so well?

The antibiotic injection helps the sheep's immune system fight the infection and reduces the swelling and pain that make the sheep lame. This allows the foot to heal and the foot conformation to return to normal.

Why does trimming the foot delay healing?

When trimming a swollen infected foot, live tissue can get damaged causing more damage to the foot which in turn takes longer to heal. Another study by Green et al., at the University of Warwick, demonstrates that foot trimming sheep with footrot leads to poor foot conformation.

When uncertain as to a correct diagnosis or course of treatment always consult your veterinary surgeon. Badly deformed feet may not respond readily to treatment and early treatment is important for good results.

The Red Meat Development Programme is delivered by Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC) on behalf of Farming Connect.

Further information regarding subsidised on-farm support and other topics is available from the Red Meat Development Programme, ring 01970 625050 or visit www.hccmpw.org.uk.

The study authors' recommended treatment for footrot

1	Remove mud / straw from the affected foot.
2	Ensure that the cause of lameness is correctly diagnosed.
3	Inject the sheep with a long acting antibiotic - DO NOT UNDER DOSE (The study used 1ml of long acting oxytetracycline per 10 kg body weight to give 2 days cover).
4	Spray the interdigital space with an antibiotic spray.
5	Check all other feet and spray them if needed.
6	If possible, isolate the sheep until recovered.
7	DO NOT TRIM THE FOOT.
8	Mark the top of the leg of the sheep you treat so that you recognise you have treated it and can monitor recovery.
9	If a sheep needs treating more than twice for footrot, even if the infected hoof is different each time, then cull.
10	Once the sheep is sound, if you are concerned about loose horn then carefully trim it away, ensuring you do not damage the foot's integrity.