

Ryegrass Staggers—What & How?

Ryegrass staggers is a condition that affects the nerves in cattle, sheep, horses, deer, horses and alpacas. Horses can be permanently affected.

It is caused by a naturally occurring ryegrass fungus that produces a toxin found mainly in the seed heads and leaf sheaths. When eaten, the toxin causes the muscle tremors and agitation commonly seen. Early signs are anxiety, slight trembling of the head and itchy skin that progresses to head nodding, jerky movements, staggering, short prancing steps and eventual collapse.

Why is ryegrass staggers a problem?

Affected stock can't be moved without risk of collapse so this makes them difficult to move for yarding or onto new pasture. Animals may lose condition and dehydrate as they are too unco-ordinated to walk to feed or drink. Although ryegrass staggers itself is not fatal, stock can get into trouble due to accidents like falling down banks, drowning in dams, tangled in electric fences and other ways to injure themselves.

What can we do?

Prevention:

- Remove animals from ryegrass pastures in high risk times (summer, autumn) - this can be difficult
- Sow new ryegrass with a low endophyte (fungus) count
- Make available summer forage crops and supplements such as hay, grain or silage

There are products available especially for horses that help prevent toxin absorption.

Treatment:

- Leave affected animals undisturbed
- Move stock slowly if they have to be moved, and leave dogs and motorbikes at home
- Move stock to safe paddocks with no natural hazards in them.

There are a few products available that help reduce the signs. Talk to us about these.

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information about our services and products

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CHB VETS LTD

Veterinary newsletter

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When Sharing isn't Caring

Giving your pet scraps of food when you are cooking or having dinner can be tempting, but there are some human foods that can be dangerous for animals so if you want to treat them, use treats made for animals.

Some examples of foods that may be dangerous for your pet to eat:

Grapes and Raisins: Even in small amounts, these can cause kidney damage that can be fatal for your pet. Signs of poisoning can include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, depression, reduced urination or increased small amounts of urine, drinking lots of water and even death. Some animals are more sensitive than others. If you know your pet has eaten grapes, it is worth a vet visit to avoid ongoing problems.



Onions: Although delicious and versatile to cook with, onions can cause anaemia in your pet by rupturing its red blood cells. Signs of poisoning include breathlessness, lethargy, loss of appetite, vomiting, and diarrhea. It can take 2—4 days after eating for signs to develop. All onion, cooked or raw, is toxic to your pet so if you think it has eaten onion, you should get it to your vet straight away.

Chocolate: This can be very dangerous for your animal with cooking chocolate being the most dangerous. Chocolate poisoning can cause vomiting, diarrhea, muscle tremors, seizures and even death so if you think your pet has eaten chocolate, give us a call straight away.

Chicken bones: Though chicken is a perfectly fine food for you or your pet, chicken bones are very brittle when cooked so can snap and cause damage to the mouth and intestines. This can mean your pet needs surgery to remove or repair their intestines.



These are just a few of the foods to avoid.

If you think your pet has eaten something it shouldn't have

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Ringworm isn't a worm....but will make your skin crawl....

Dermatophytosis, better known as Ringworm, is actually caused by fungi. There are different species causing similar signs. It affects the hair shaft and the superficial skin layer. We most commonly see it in kittens, puppies and immunocompromised animals. These would include animals that are under stress, such as malnourishment or overcrowding. Certain breeds seem to be more predisposed to getting infected. The fungus gets transmitted by contact, either direct or indirect. The spores or hyphae of the fungi stick to objects and can be transferred in this manner. It can take anything from 2-4 weeks from first contact with it, until signs are seen.



Affected areas seen on kitten's nose and on the pup's legs and forehead

The signs you might see include hairless patches that may be itchy and scaly. These skin lesions could be irregular, circular, single or multiple. Hair left in these regions looks like it may have broken off or it pulls out very easily. The affected areas can range from the ears, nose, feet, around nail beds to all over the body.

These lesions can be confused with a few other skin conditions, therefore it is important to see your vet sooner than later.

Another reason to act quickly is because it is a contagious condition for other animals and people as well. Also, when an animal is left without treatment, secondary complications such

as bacterial infections can make treatment more difficult and longer.

There are different ways to confirm this condition. For instance, Wood's lamp, microscopy, histology and or culture.

The appearance of it that can be expected on humans vary. It can start off as a sensitive spot which could become itchy. Initially it is small then it becomes bigger and more circular. The edges are red and raised with a flakey dry or crusty center, hence the name "ringworm". If you suspect you have it, see your pharmacist for treatment.

Treatment depends on the severity and how the animal responds to therapy. Options include topical antifungal creams, shampoos.

Systemic antifungal therapy might be combined with topical medications. Multi-animal homes, catteries and animal facilities needs to follow an in depth and strict disinfecting protocol together with treatment.

Washing your hands after working with animals, especially if they have suspicious lesions, is the best prevention. If an animal has been diagnosed in a multi-animal household, the best prevention includes keeping them apart, washing your hands in between touching animals and disinfecting the areas the animal spends time in. There is a 3 week risk time after the last animal gets it before you can be sure the outbreak is over.



Kitten with ringworm on nose and lip

Enzootic pneumonia in Sheep

Pneumonia in sheep is a complex disease involving different bacteria and viruses and can cause acute and chronic infections. Sheep of all ages can be affected but it is mainly seen in lambs and hoggets. The signs we see in acute cases are most commonly coughing in the mob particularly when driven. We can also see nasal discharge, lagging behind and respiratory distress, and even sudden death. Some animals become chronically affected and will show as the unthrifty ones—the tail enders.

What makes your animals more susceptible to pneumonia?

Pneumonia is often related to stress during mustering and yarding, especially in dry and dusty conditions, and heat stress and transport.

Economic effects

- Direct losses of stock
- Prolonged sporadic losses
- Reduced weight gain, up to 50% lower than unaffected lambs, and reduced wool production
- Rejection and downgrading of carcasses in stock sent for slaughter

How do I know if my flock is affected?

The clinical signs shown by affected animals, but also post mortem findings in sheep found dead, or unthrifty animals, and slaughter reports will give you a better idea about the status of the flock.

Treatment

Treatment of individual sheep is generally not curative. The most important way of reducing losses is the prevention of pneumonia.



Prevention of pneumonia

- Avoid stress as much as possible
- Avoid yarding and close confinement under hot and dusty conditions
- Muster early in the morning
- Try to minimize droving distances
- Use sprinkler systems in the yards to dampen down the dust
- Use of portable yards to shorten times of droving
- Control dogs when not at work so they don't disturb sheep unnecessarily
- Maintaining good stock health during risk periods (drenching and good food)



Emergency afterhours number

027 249 3731

We have a vet on duty 24 hours, 7 days a week