

## Footrot FAQs

### 1. How long does footrot last in the ground?

Research has shown that the footrot bacteria will not survive for more than seven days in the ground. A seven day spelling period is advised to ensure no risk of spread.

### 2. What's the purpose of vaccinating for footrot?

If you don't have footrot on your farm then don't vaccinate. The vaccine does not completely prevent or cure the disease.

The footrot vaccine (Footvax multivalent vaccine) was a very useful aid in controlling the spread of the disease in infected flocks. Vaccination is not used in flocks infected with benign footrot. Footbathing will give adequate control in this situation.

New vaccines incorporating 1-2 serogroups per vaccine depending on strains present on farm may provide a useful control option if it becomes commercially available in future

### 3. Does vaccination mask the disease, therefore reduce the ability to eradicate footrot?

Vaccination does not mask footrot and does not reduce the chances of footrot eradication.

In fact a properly designed control program will increase the likelihood of eradication because less sheep will go into summer with clinical footrot lesion resulting in easier inspections, less reliance on antibiotics to salvage sheep, culling of infected sheep and lower chances of missing infected sheep.

### 4. Can feral animals, kangaroos, gumboots and motorbikes spread footrot?

This is virtually impossible. Footrot is likely to be introduced onto a property from straying sheep, a recently purchased infected ram, or that bargain mob of wethers purchased at the last sale.

Car tyres, foxes and kangaroos are of minimal or no importance in the spread of footrot.

It is best to disinfect boots when moving between infected and clean mobs.

### 5. Should I inject all my sheep with antibiotics to get rid of footrot?

No. However, antibiotics can be a terrific aid to footrot eradication for salvaging sheep when the flock has more than 10-20% affected at the start of summer.

Antibiotics don't cure 100% of footrot affected sheep - they are not a one shot magic cure. The hard work of pulling out the remaining affected sheep still must be done.

Antibiotics are only effective when conditions are very dry and are an aid for salvaging sheep during footrot eradication. Antibiotics can only be used under the guidance of your veterinarian.

#### **6. It's not footrot, it's just a bit of 'scald', isn't it?**

Rather than being hesitant about lame sheep, it's time to get an expert diagnosis as soon as you see them.

Different strains of the footrot bacteria cause footrot of differing severity ranging from mild to severe lameness.

Many producers make poor decisions and face unnecessary anxiety and stress by not diagnosing the cause of lameness.

Recognising a footrot problem is the first step to management and eradication. Start calling footrot for what it is!

Seek advice to determine if the strain present is benign or virulent.

#### **7. Do I have to pare the feet heavily to get rid of footrot?**

Paring alone does not get rid of footrot. The major role of paring is to enable you to inspect the feet.

Once you are happy all four feet are normal then a sheep is considered clean. If a sheep does not have four normal feet, it should be culled.

A common mistake is to pare too heavily which causes bleeding and obscures the feet making it more difficult to make an accurate diagnosis.

#### **8. Why can't I cure my sheep with severe footrot lesions?**

A common mistake with farmers trying to eradicate footrot is that they concentrate on the infected sheep.

This is the wrong approach. Farmers should concentrate on all mobs including provisionally clean mobs to identify and cull any infected sheep.

#### **9. Will treatment of my sheep with Copper or Zinc help get rid of footrot?**

No. It is a common misconception, and totally incorrect, to expect that top dressing pasture or drenching sheep with trace elements will eradicate footrot.

Footbathing in Copper Sulphate will stain wool and this may decrease in wool value.

## **10. Can cattle give my sheep footrot?**

Benign strains of footrot can infect cattle and are readily transferred by cattle. Virulent strains of footrot can be mechanically spread by cattle, probably only when conditions are wet.

However, the role of cattle in the spread of virulent footrot is still unclear and probably occurs very infrequently.

Cattle do not appear to be capable of carrying virulent strains of footrot for long periods so do not affect the success of eradication when conditions are dry.

### **Ends.**

LBN is an independent industry initiative established by the Cattle Council of Australia, Sheepmeat Council of Australia and WoolProducers Australia - the initiative will be funded over a three-year pilot period by industry levies held in trust.

LBN provides producers with practical information about implementing on-farm animal health, welfare and biosecurity measures to deal with the many risks producers face.

LBN regional officers are working closely with existing farming networks, raising awareness of biosecurity risks and the need to be prepared for possible outbreaks of exotic or endemic diseases and harmful pests, including on-farm biosecurity plans.