Blowfly Strike in Sheep

Blowflies are the most widespread ectoparasite affecting sheep in the UK, with surveys showing that every year 80% of flocks will have one or more cases of strike. If not properly controlled, this will result in serious welfare problems and reduced profitability in up to 500,000 sheep.

In the UK, blowfly strike is usually caused by the greenbottle fly. The females are attracted by the odour of decomposing matter such as wounds, soiled fleece or dead animals. Each female lays up to 250 eggs which hatch after about 12 hours. After 3 days the mature larvae drop off the sheep and pupate in the soil. Blowfly strikes usually occur in waves. The first fly lays her eggs and the odour from this strike attracts other flies. When the populations of larvae become overcrowded they will attack the living tissue of the sheep. The first signs in affected sheep are a patch of discoloured wool and agitation, and rapid diagnosis and treatment are essential.

Traditionally, we expect to see blowfly strike between May and September but with changing weather patterns, such as we have had recently, lowland flocks are at risk from March through to December. With increasing flock sizes and the need to rationalise labour use to improve profitability, flocks must have a plan that will provide protection during the risk period and fit with the need to control other parasites.

Blowfly strike can be prevented through the application of an appropriate product before a period of challenge. The table overleaf contains a list of the products currently licensed for this use.
# Products Licensed for Prevention and/or Treatment of Blowfly Strike

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chemical</th>
<th>Trade name(s)</th>
<th>Blowfly prevention period*</th>
<th>Blowfly Treatment</th>
<th>Other Ectoparasites covered</th>
<th>Meat withdrawal (days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyromazine (IGR)**</td>
<td>Vetrazin</td>
<td>10 weeks</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dicyclanil (IGR)**</td>
<td>Clik</td>
<td>16 weeks</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cypermethrin pour-on</td>
<td>Crovect</td>
<td>6-8 weeks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Lice, ticks, headfly</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha cypermethrin pour on</td>
<td>Dysect</td>
<td>8-10 weeks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Lice, ticks, headfly</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OP Dip</td>
<td>Coopers Ectoforce Paracide Plus Osmaonds Golden fleece</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Lice, ticks, keds, headfly and scab</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SP Dips - are currently under marketing suspension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Robust Auriplak Ecofleece</strong></td>
<td><strong>8-10 weeks</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td><strong>Lice, ticks, keds headfly and scab</strong></td>
<td><strong>12-18 depending on product</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Apply before period of challenge.
** IGR = Insect Growth Regulator. These products do not stop the fly laying her eggs, but do stop the larvae from developing fully and give longer term protection.

**REMEMBER**, when using these products **ALWAYS** read the manufacturers instructions on dose rate, storage and withdrawal periods. Check application equipment is working properly and calibrated. Replenish dips according to instructions and follow safety guidelines.

## Reducing the Risks

Good management and planning can help to reduce the risk of strike occurring. Most strikes (over 70%) occur around the breech or tail where there is faecal and/or urine soiling as these are very attractive to the flies, with the rest on the body or in the feet.

- Dag to reduce soiling and/or remove dirty wool around the breech
- Reduce the incidence of soiling by avoiding nutritional upsets causing scouring and having a sound worm control strategy
- Tail sheep
- Avoid breeding from sheep that are habitually struck and/or tend to soil themselves due to their conformation
- Dispose of carcases quickly
- Reduce the incidence of footrot

For more information contact your Vet, adviser or visit:  
[www.nationalsheep.org](http://www.nationalsheep.org)