

Fact sheet 2. General healthcare for your wether



MOHAIR AUSTRALIA
YOUTH PROGRAM

To reduce the chance of your wether becoming unwell, there are certain basic things you can do to keep him as healthy as possible. These include to:

- check him twice a day to make sure he appears healthy
- set up and follow a health program to prevent or control some of the more common health problems
- provide him with clean, healthy living conditions.

Check your wether

Each time you feed and water your goat, which will be at least twice a day, take the opportunity to check him over and make sure he looks and acts like his normal healthy self. Doing this frequently, will mean you can catch most health problems when they first start and before they become too serious.

As a general guide, check:

- if he is standing hunched up with his tail drooping down
- whether he is lame, moving stiffly, or having trouble standing or walking
- if his coat is rough, flaky or bald in spots
- for any unusual lumps or swellings
- if his eyes look dull or cloudy
- if his eyes or nose are runny. Is he coughing, wheezing or breathing hard?
- if his appetite is poor
- whether he is having trouble chewing or swallowing
- if he seems depressed, weak or uninterested in his surroundings
- whether he has diarrhoea
- if he is having trouble urinating or if there are signs of blood in his urine.

You should keep track of your goat's body condition and mohair growth, and record how they change from season to season. If you think your wether is losing or gaining too much weight on his feed ration, weigh him regularly and then adjust the feed to make sure he is growing well.

If you think your wether looks unwell, check and record his vital signs (temperature, breathing rate, heartbeat and rumen movements), make him as comfortable as you can, and contact a veterinarian or whoever your go-to goat expert is. Give them your observations, so you can start to work out what is wrong and how you can treat him to help make him better.

Vital signs

A normal **temperature** for a goat is taken rectally, and is between 38.8°C and 39.4°C. It may be slightly higher for a goat kid. High ambient temperatures (how hot the surrounding air is) and exercise can increase your goat's normal temperature. If his temperature is a bit high, you can compare it to that of other goats in your herd. If he has been exercising, let him calm down and then take his temperature again.

To take your goat's temperature, it is best to use a livestock digital thermometer. After you've turned it on, insert the thermometer gently under the goat's tail partway into his rectum, making sure you hold on to it tightly. It can help to use a bit of Vaseline on the tip of it, so it goes in more easily. Hold it there for three minutes or until it beeps to say it has reached the right temperature.

The normal **respiration rate** for your wether is between 12 and 15 breaths per minute. It is higher for goat kids. Watch your goat breathe in and out for one minute and count how many breaths he takes in that time.

For a wether, the normal **heartbeat** or pulse rate is between 70 and 80 per minute. It is faster for goat kids. To measure this, place your fingers on each side of his lower ribcage and feel for his heartbeats. Over a full

minute, count how many heartbeats there are. You can also place your hand on the inside upper thigh on his rear leg, feel for the pulse in the artery there and count the beats in one minute.

A rumen movement of one to two over a minute is normal. Place your hand on the left flank of your goat to feel for rumen movements. If touching him there seems to hurt him, or if his rumen feels tight, or slushy as if filled with water, this may be a sign of a health problem.

Health program

In developing a health program for your wether, find out what vaccinations, worming and supplementation programs are recommended in your area.

Work with your management plan to make sure you have your wether health under control.

Vaccinations

Enterotoxaemia and tetanus are two common diseases for goats caused by soil-borne bacteria. You can reduce the risk of your goat getting one of these diseases by vaccinating him.

There are rules around the length of time before slaughter that various vaccines and wormers must be given, so there are no drug residues detected in the goat's meat. This is referred to as the withholding period(WP) Give vaccine injections just under the skin and not directly into the muscle to avoid bruising the goat's meat.

Goat kids are vaccinated with a 3-in-1 (or more combinations) clostridium vaccine at about 10 weeks of age, and then again, three to four weeks later. If the goats are in a feed lot, this vaccine is often repeated every four months to boost protection.

Most adult goats are vaccinated up to four times per year, after they receive their two vaccinations as kids. A good husbandry practice is to vaccinate pregnant does between four and six weeks before they are due to kid, so that the newborn kids are protected against these diseases until they are old enough to effectively vaccinate.

If you are buying a goat, make sure it has had both boosters for these diseases. If you're not sure, vaccinate and drench anyway.

Parasites

Parasites such as internal worms can be a serious problem in goats, particularly for goat kids and adult goats that are pastured. Your wether should be wormed at weaning and then regularly throughout summer as required. If you buy a wether, you should worm him as soon as you bring him home.

Pastured herds are often wormed:

- in winter to eliminate any worms that are in immature stages in the goat's guts
- during kidding, when the hormones produced at this time trigger a large release of worm eggs in the goat's manure
- in spring before being put out to pasture
- when being moved to clean sections of pasture.

As the weather warms up in spring, goats are shorn, lice can become a problem. Always check for lice and treat the goats if you notice any flaky skin or if they are using their horns to scratch themselves are an indicator that there is a lice outbreak

Coccidia is a tiny parasite found in a goat's gut, which can cause loss of appetite and diarrhoea. Older goats will become resistant to it, but it can be a serious issue for young goats, particularly when they are overcrowded or as they go through the stress of weaning.

You should treat your wether for coccidia when you first get him so that the stress levels of change of environment causes an outbreak

You can do this either by giving him a mineral lick that contains Bovatec /Rumensin or by adding Bovatec/ Rumensin to his pellets feed ration. **NB** Rumensin is registered by the AMFP for goats

Supplementation

Selenium is an essential mineral for goats that is lacking in soils, hay and grain in some parts of Australia. Ensure that your wether has access to a loose mineral mix or pellet feed that contains selenium and vitamin E adlib.

Living conditions

Your goats need a clean, dry, well ventilated shed that is spacious enough to avoid overcrowding and protects them from extreme cold, heat, rain and snow. Overcrowded goats are more likely to get sick.

Keep the hay rack and waterer clean and free from excrement. During hot weather, place water containers in the shade where the water will stay cool longer.

Suggested activities

- In the goat group, take each other's oral temperatures, pulse and respiration rates. Then practice measuring rectal temperatures, pulse, respiration and rumen movements on some goats. Get together with the rest of your goat group and learn how to give injections (if permitted by your school) and drench goats properly.
- For younger students, create a poster or drawing of some of the symptoms of a sick goat. You can hang your poster in your shed or room to use as a checklist, or use it as part of an oral presentation.
- When your wethers arrived at school use the check list and formulate a management plan calendar to record when you should plan vaccinating, worming, and husbandry practices like feet trimming. Remember to include legal withdrawal periods for all chemicals used in your husbandry practices for goats. **Resource :** Management plan
- Find out how to do a worm test and what an egg count is.
- Record your wether's health status –Angora goat wether competition project record

Resources

DIY worm egg counting, 2017, NSW Government Department of Primary Industries.

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/749292/DIY-worm-egg-counts-livestock-incl-poultry.pdf

Why and how to do FAMACHA scoring, 2016, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, US Department of Agriculture. https://web.uri.edu/sheepngoat/files/FAMACHA-Scoring_Final2.pdf

Parasites and goats, 2017, University of Maryland Extension.

<https://www.slideshare.net/schoenian/parasites-in-goats>