Liver fluke is one of the more complex and often overlooked parasite challenges in livestock. In the right conditions, infections can build over time and impact animal performance before obvious signs appear. For producers in higher rainfall or irrigated areas, understanding fluke risk is critical.

Unlike many gastrointestinal worms, liver fluke has a more complex lifecycle that relies on specific environmental factors, making seasonal awareness and timing critical for effective management.

Knowing when to act can make a significant difference to livestock health and productivity.

Why liver fluke risk increases in autumn

Liver fluke requires an intermediate host, typically freshwater snails, to complete its lifecycle. These snails thrive in wet areas such as drainage lines, irrigated pastures and low-lying paddocks.

Periods of rainfall and mild temperatures support both snail populations and the development of infective fluke larvae. As livestock graze these areas, they ingest the larvae, which then migrate through the animal's liver as they mature.

By autumn, livestock may have been exposed to fluke over several months, particularly in higher rainfall regions or properties with persistent wet areas. This is often when the impact on animal health and performance becomes more apparent.

Which livestock are affected by liver fluke?

Liver fluke can affect a range of grazing livestock, most commonly sheep, cattle and goats. A large range of species are susceptible, although the

impact can vary depending on the level of infection and environmental conditions.

Sheep are generally more sensitive to fluke burdens and may show more obvious production impacts, while cattle can carry infections for longer periods, often with more subtle signs.

In regions where conditions favour fluke development, both sheep and cattle should be considered at risk, particularly when grazing wet or low-lying areas.

Recognising the signs of liver fluke

Liver fluke infections can affect livestock in both acute and chronic forms, with symptoms varying depending on the level of infestation. Producers may observe:

- reduced weight gain or poor growth
- loss of body condition
- anaemia (pale gums or eyelids)
- lethargy or reduced grazing activity
- in some cases, sudden losses in heavily affected animals

Because these signs can develop gradually, liver fluke may go unnoticed until production impacts become significant.

The impact on livestock performance

Liver fluke affects the liver, an organ critical to metabolism, nutrient processing and overall health. Damage caused by migrating fluke can reduce feed efficiency and compromise growth and productivity

In production systems, this can lead to lower weight gains, reduced fertility and overall declines in animal performance. In some cases, secondary complications may arise due to reduced immunity and general condition.

In some cases, liver fluke can lead to serious health issues and may be fatal if left untreated.
Heavy infections, particularly in sheep, can cause significant liver damage and blood loss, which may result in sudden deaths.

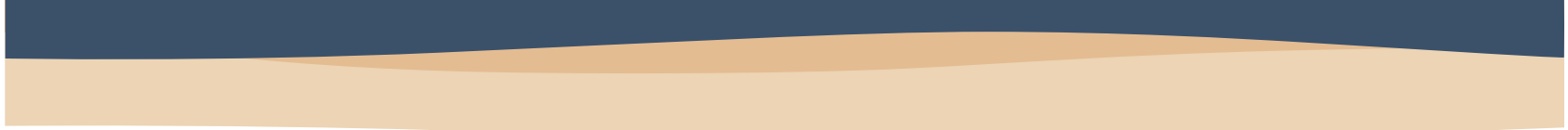
Monitoring and managing fluke risk

Effective liver fluke control relies on understanding both the environmental risk and the lifecycle of the parasite. Identifying high-risk areas on farm, such as wet paddocks or irrigation zones, can help guide management decisions.

Diagnostic tools, including faecal egg counts and liver fluke testing, can assist in determining the presence and severity of infection.
Where treatment is required, timing plays an important role. Treating too early or too late in the lifecycle can reduce effectiveness, so aligning treatments with seasonal risk is key.

Treatment options within a parasite management program

Effective liver fluke control requires a considered, multi-factored approach that considers seasonal conditions, pasture risk and the lifecycle of the parasite.



On properties where fluke is present, a management strategy may include monitoring livestock through testing, identifying high-risk paddocks, fencing off high risk wet areas and applying treatments at key times of the year. Strategic treatments can help reduce fluke burdens within livestock while also limiting pasture contamination and ongoing reinfection.

Because liver fluke develops through multiple stages within the animal, selecting a treatment that targets the stages present at the time of application is important. In autumn, livestock are often carrying a mix of early immature, immature and adult fluke, which can influence both product choice and timing.

Products such as HRC Abatech Ultra Pour-On are designed to target all three stages of liver fluke, including early immature, immature and adult fluke. This can be particularly valuable during higher-risk periods when multiple stages may be present at once.
Selecting the right treatment and applying it at the appropriate time can help reduce fluke burdens, support livestock performance and form part of a broader parasite management strategy.

If you have any concerns regarding your livestock and liver fluke, please consult your veterinarian.

Across many Australian sheep-producing regions, autumn marks a period when internal parasite burdens can begin to build. After months of warm conditions and grazing pressure, worm populations on pasture may reach levels where they begin to affect flock performance.

Internal parasites are a constant challenge in grazing systems. Their impact is not always immediately visible, but over time they can reduce weight gain, compromise wool production and affect overall flock productivity. Understanding how worm burdens develop through the season is an important part of maintaining animal health and managing risk within a flock.

Why autumn is a key period for worm pressure

The lifecycle of most gastrointestinal worms relies heavily on environmental conditions. Warm temperatures and periods of moisture allow eggs passed in manure to develop into infective larvae on pasture.
As sheep graze, they ingest these larvae, allowing the cycle to continue within the animal. Over the course of summer and early autumn this process can lead to increasing levels of contamination in grazing areas.
By autumn, sheep may have been exposed to several generations of worms. This accumulation can result in higher parasite burdens within the flock, particularly in young or growing sheep that have not yet developed strong immunity.

Recognising the signs of worm burdens

The effects of internal parasites often appear gradually. In many cases the first signs are reduced productivity rather than obvious illness.
Producers may notice:
· scouring in affected sheep
· reduced weight gain or poor growth rates
· declining body condition
· dull or poor-quality wool
· reduced appetite or general thriftiness

Young sheep and lambs are typically more vulnerable, although adult animals can also be affected when parasite pressure becomes significant.

Managing parasite pressure in grazing systems

Effective parasite control rarely relies on a single intervention. Monitoring flock performance, observing pasture conditions and responding to seasonal changes all play a role in managing worm burdens.

Treatment decisions are often based on a combination of experience, observation and diagnostic testing. Faecal egg counts can provide useful insight into parasite levels and help determine whether treatment is required.

When treatment is necessary, worm drenches and vaccinations remain an important tool in reducing parasite burdens and supporting flock performance.

Treatment options within a parasite management program

A range of drench options are available to assist with parasite control in sheep. These products vary in their active ingredients and spectrum of activity, allowing producers to select treatments that suit their flock's needs and the parasite challenges present on their property.
Choosing the right drench and applying it at the appropriate time can help reduce worm burdens and support flock performance. Treatment decisions should always consider seasonal conditions, parasite pressure and long-term resistance management.
Independents Own have selection of sheep worm treatments designed to support parasite control in Australian grazing systems. You can explore

the Independents Own sheep worming range here

For further advice please consult your local veterinarian.

Internal parasites are a common challenge in grazing systems, particularly as seasonal conditions change. Worm burdens often build gradually, meaning the early signs can be subtle and easy to overlook.

Recognising potential parasite problems early can help producers respond quickly and minimise the impact on flock performance.

1. Scouring
   Scouring, or diarrhoea, is one of the most commonly recognised indicators of worm burdens in sheep. While scouring can have several causes, including dietary changes, persistent or widespread scouring within a mob can indicate the presence of gastrointestinal parasites.

2. Reduced weight gain
   Parasites compete with the animal for nutrients, which can reduce feed efficiency and growth rates. Sheep affected by worm burdens may appear slow to finish or may struggle to maintain body condition despite adequate feed availability.

3. Poor condition and thriftiness
   Sheep carrying significant worm burdens may show a general decline in condition. This can include weight loss, a dull fleece, or a lack of overall vigour.

Monitoring flock health

Because parasite challenges can develop over time, monitoring livestock condition and pasture pressure remains important throughout the grazing season. Diagnostic tools such as faecal egg counts can help determine whether worm burdens are present and if treatment may be required.

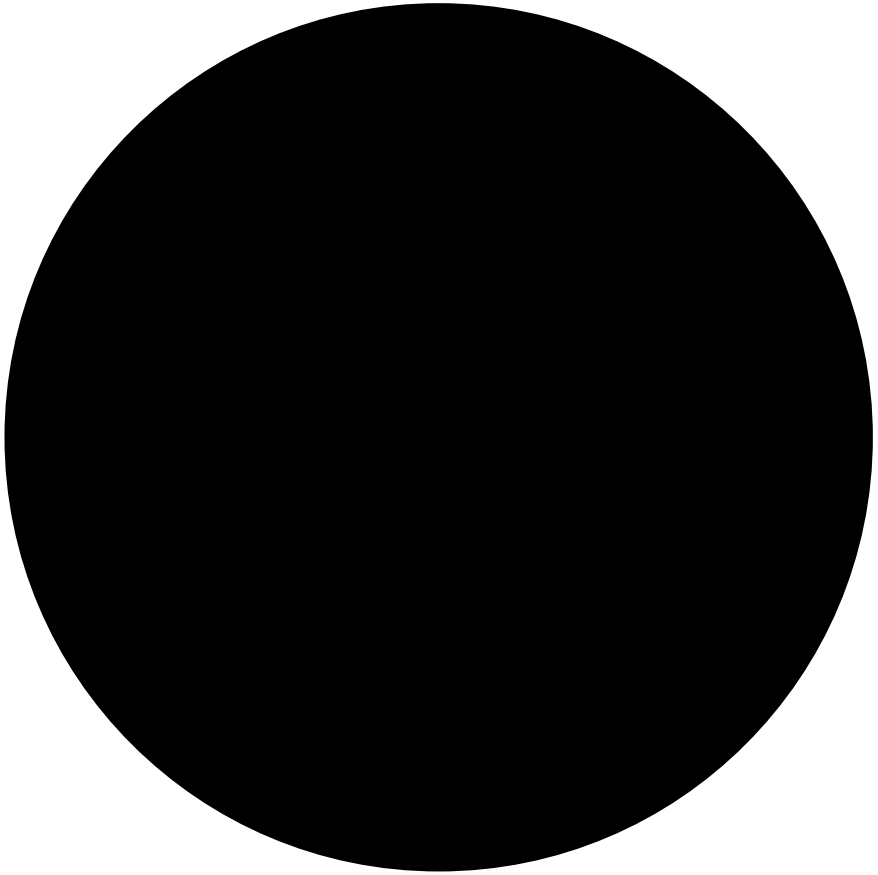
If producers suspect worm issues within a flock, a veterinarian can assist with advice on monitoring and parasite management options.

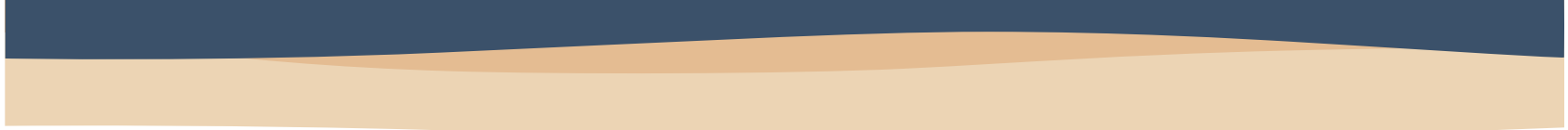
Seasonal conditions play a major role in the development of internal parasites in grazing livestock. For many sheep producers, autumn represents a period when worm burdens can begin to increase after several months of exposure on pasture.

Understanding why parasite pressure often rises during this time can help producers make more informed decisions about monitoring and treatment.

The worm lifecycle on pasture

Most gastrointestinal worms rely on pasture to complete their lifecycle. Eggs passed in manure develop into larvae that migrate onto surrounding pasture where they can be ingested by grazing sheep. Warm temperatures and periods of moisture provide favourable conditions for this development, allowing larvae to accumulate in grazing areas over time





Exposure builds through the season

By the time autumn arrives, sheep may have been grazing contaminated pasture for several months. This exposure can result in increasing parasite burdens within the flock, particularly where grazing pressure has been high or where young sheep are present.

Monitoring and management

Observation of livestock condition, pasture management and diagnostic tools such as faecal egg counts can all assist in identifying parasite challenges. Where treatment is required, a range of worm control options are available through rural retailers to help manage parasite burdens and support flock performance.

For further advice please consult your local veterinarian