

CLIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

OPTIONAL
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ABORTION: SMALL RUMINANTS

Overview

Abortion is the expulsion of non-viable fetus(es) before term. Most abortions are observed after 2 months of pregnancy. Abortion in a flock or herd can be accompanied by other problems such as poor pregnancy rates, neonatal loss and congenital abnormalities in newborn lambs or kids.

Several of the abortion causing infectious agents in sheep and goats are zoonotic (can cause illness in humans). These include, brucellosis, Q-fever, Campylobacteriosis, toxoplasmosis, leptospirosis and salmonellosis.

Diagnosis of the cause of abortion can be frustrating and requires laboratory support.

Species and Animal Groups Affected

Pregnant ewes or does can be affected at any stage of pregnancy.

Newborn lambs and kids may show abnormalities and poor survival rate.

Some infectious abortion causing diseases are venereal and may be transmitted to breeding males causing infertility due to infection of the testicles (orchitis) or the epididymis (epididymitis).

Signs

Clinical signs are variable and depend on the cause of abortion. Pregnant females may become sick (fever, lack of appetite, swelling of the perineal area) before abortion due to some infectious diseases such as leptospirosis, bluetongue, brucellosis, salmonellosis and mycoplasmosis.

Abortion is obvious when fetuses are expelled before term. In herds or flocks that are not closely monitored the only signs may be bloody or mucous vaginal discharge and retained placenta.

Birth of abnormal neonates is common with some infections

Causes

Abortion may be due to infectious or non-infectious causes. The infectious causes of abortions are the most common and can be due to a parasites (Toxoplasmosis), viruses (Border disease, Cache Valley, Schmallenberg, Caprine herpes virus and others), or bacteria (Q-fever, Campylobacteriosis, Chlamydiosis, Brucellosis, Leptospirosis, Listeriosis and others)

Abortion can be caused by plants that accumulate nitrate and by administration of drugs such as levamisole and corticosteroids. Poor nutrition may also be a cause.

Abortion may be caused by a genetic predisposition such as in fine mohair producing angora goats.

Risk Factors

Poor biosecurity measures such as poor fencing (exposure to wildlife), introduction of infected or non-tested animals, and lack of quarantine) and extensive movement of animal and people between flocks or herds.

Poor vaccination protocol.

Poor control of vermin.

Poor nutrition.

Treatment

Treatment of aborting females aims at reducing any complications due to retained placenta, fever and poor appetite.

In some situation and under the guidance of a veterinarian, pregnant females receive antibiotics treatment (tetracyclines or other) to prevent further loss due to some infectious agents.

Management Considerations

Every instance of abortion should be taken seriously. The veterinarian should be called to discuss an intervention plan.

Aborting females should be isolated.

Aborted fetuses and the placenta should be submitted to a laboratory for diagnosis of the cause of abortion. Other samples may be required such as vaginal discharge and blood from the aborting female.

Expected Course and Prognosis

Diagnosis of the cause of abortion may be very frustrating in the case of a single animal. However in the case of abortion storm particularly when the cause is infectious, diagnosis is reached when all the proper samples are submitted to a qualified laboratory. The prognosis in terms of loss of lamb or kid crop is variable depending on the cause. Prognosis of survival of aborting females is generally good but they can continue to shed the bacteria or viruses for variable length of time. Following diagnosis, a plan should be devised with the attending veterinarian to prevent further abortions through vaccinations and biosecurity measures.

Notes

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Blackwell's 5-Minute Veterinary Consult: Ruminant 2nd Ed.

Blackwell's Five-Minute Veterinary Consult: Ruminants, Second Edition, Christopher C.L. Chase, Kaitlyn A. Lutz, Erica C. McKenzie and Ahmed Tibary © 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.