

# Contagious Ecthyma

## Orf, Scabby Mouth, Sore Mouth

### What is contagious ecthyma and what causes it?

Contagious ecthyma (ek-THIGH-ma) is also known as soremouth, scabby mouth and contagious pustular dermatitis.

It is a viral disease found worldwide in countries that raise sheep. In the United States, it is most often seen in the Western states (e.g. Wyoming, Colorado, California and Texas).

It causes sores and blisters on the lips, nose, ears, and/or eyelids of sheep, goats, and other animals. Humans can also be affected through contact with infected animals.

### What animals get contagious ecthyma?

Contagious ecthyma occurs in sheep, goats, alpacas, camels, and other wild ruminants. Rare cases have been reported in dogs that ate infected carcasses.

### How can my animal get contagious ecthyma?

The virus is found in skin lesions and scabs of infected animals and is thought to enter by **direct contact** with cuts and abrasions in the skin. The virus can also be spread by **fomites** (inanimate objects such as shoes or clothing, halters, brushes, and other equipment).

The virus is very hardy in the environment. It can remain on the wool and hides for approximately one month after the lesions have healed and has been recovered from scabs after 12 years.

### How does contagious ecthyma affect my animal?

Signs are seen in 2 to 3 days after sheep and goats are exposed to the virus. The first signs are small raised bumps (papules), sores, and blisters found on the lips, nose, ears, and/or eyelids. Nursing lambs can transmit the virus to their dam, resulting in lesions on the teats and udder. Because these lesions can be painful, they can result in loss of appetite, weight loss, or even starvation. Excess salivation can occur.

### Can I get contagious ecthyma?

Yes. Contagious ecthyma in humans is called orf (ore-F). Signs are usually seen 3 to 7 days after exposure to the virus. Exposure occurs by **direct contact** with skin lesions or scabs of infected animals.

In humans, usually only one single skin lesion develops. Typically the lesion heals on its own in 2 to 6 weeks without scarring.

### Who should I contact, if I suspect contagious ecthyma?

#### In Animals –

Contact your veterinarian.

#### In Humans –

Contact your physician.

### How can I protect my animal from contagious ecthyma?

Isolate sick animals to limit exposure to others. Thoroughly and frequently clean and disinfect areas where ill animals are kept.

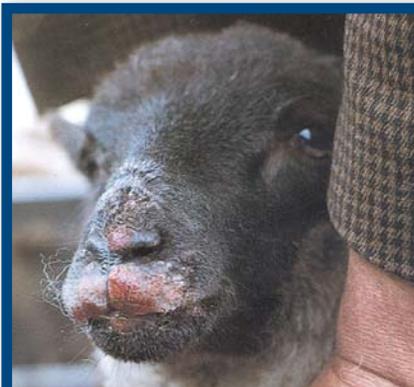
Vaccination is available for some situations. Recently vaccinated animals should be isolated from unvaccinated animals. Since the vaccine contains modified live virus, humans should use care when administering the vaccine to avoid the risk of infection to themselves.

### How can I protect myself from contagious ecthyma?

Wash your hands frequently after working with animals. Wear disposable gloves when handling sick animals. Minimize contact with sores as much as possible. Be careful when handling the vaccine.

### For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets. Contagious Ecthyma at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>



**Contagious ecthyma**  
causes lesions on the  
muzzle of sheep and goats.

Photo from <http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk>