

Sheep and Goat Pox

What are sheep and goat pox and what causes them?

Sheep and goat pox are contagious viral skin diseases of sheep and goats. The blistering skin lesions that form during infection can lead to substantial economic losses due to decreased milk production, damage to hides and wool, and possible import restrictions.

Sheep and goat pox occurs in parts of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and India. These viruses have not been found in North America and are referred to as foreign animal diseases.

What animals get sheep and goat pox?

Sheep and goat pox only affects sheep and goats. Young or stressed animals are particularly susceptible. Animals with concurrent disease are also highly susceptible.

How can my animal get sheep and goat pox?

Sheep and goat pox viruses are spread by **aerosol** (respiratory secretions) between animals, **direct contact** or indirectly by **fomites**. The viruses are found in saliva, secretions from the nose or eyes, milk, urine and feces. The scabs from skin lesions are also contagious and may be present in dust or soil. The virus may also be spread by insects (**vector**). The viruses can be found for as long as three months on the hair and wool of infected animals.

How do sheep and goat pox affect my animal?

The disease can vary from mild to severe depending on the animal's age, breed, immunity and other factors.

The first sign of disease is usually fever, followed one to five days later by reddened lesions that appear in localized areas on sparsely woolled/haired skin (e.g., muzzle, eyelids, ears, udder); more severe cases will have lesions all over the body. These red spots initially become filled with fluid (blisters), but later harden and form scabs. Affected animals may be lethargic, depressed and refuse to eat. Discharge from the eyes and nose and swollen eyelids may be seen. If lesions develop in the lungs, animals may have difficulty breathing. Skin lesions can become infected with bacteria. Death can occur at any stage of the disease, sometimes even before lesions become apparent.

Can I get sheep and goat pox?

No. Humans are not at risk of developing sheep and goat pox.

Who should I contact, if I suspect sheep and goat pox?

Contact your veterinarian immediately. Sheep and goat pox are not currently found in the U.S.; suspicion of disease requires immediate attention.

How can I protect my animals from sheep and goat pox?

Animals imported from countries where sheep and goat pox exist must be carefully examined by veterinarians upon entry into the United States. Any new animals entering the farm should be quarantined away from the rest of the herd until it is determined that they are healthy and there is no risk to the other animals on the farm. A vaccine is available for animals in regions where the disease is present.

For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets. Sheep and Goat Pox at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>

Sheep and Goat Pox is a highly contagious viral disease of sheep and goats with severe economic consequences.



Photo: Pox lesions on skin of a sheep. From USDA Plum Island Animal Disease Center.