

# SORE MOUTH

Sore mouth is the most common skin disease affecting sheep and goats. It is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus in the pox family. It is also known as contagious pustular dermatitis, contagious ecthyma, or orf. Sheep/goats can be infected with the sore mouth virus more than once in their lifetimes, but later infections are usually milder.



Sore mouth causes scabs and pustules, usually around the mouth and face of affected animals, sometimes on the legs and teats. The scabs shed from infected animals onto pasture and in pens can be infectious to other animals for many years. Some animals may also carry the virus and infect other animals. Sheep/goats become infected with sore mouth when abrasions in the skin allow the virus to enter and establish. Purchased sheep or goats should be quarantined in order to allow any signs of sore mouth to show up before the new animals introduce sore mouth (or a new strain) to the premises.

Sore mouth is most serious when nursing lambs/kids contract the disease. They may refuse to nurse and may die from starvation. The infection may be transmitted to the teats and udder of ewes/does causing pain and abandonment of lambs/kids. Mastitis may also result. Sore mouth can reduce performance of older lambs/kids, as the sores make eating painful. Since it is a contagious disease, sore mouth also prevents the exhibition and movement of animals until lesions have healed.



Treatment of sore mouth is usually of little value. Because it is a virus, sore mouth does not respond to antibiotics. Softening ointments may help. WD-40 is purported to help dry out scabs quicker and hasten healing. Secondary bacterial infections may develop as a result of sore mouth and may need to be treated. Animals usually recover from sore mouth **on their own**, usually within a month.

There are vaccines for sore mouth. They are LIVE and cause mild infections. They are applied to hair- or wool-less areas on the animal (e.g., inside flank, ear). The vaccines should not be used in naïve flocks/herds.



Sore mouth is a zoonotic disease which means it can be transmitted from animals to humans. Sore mouth or "orf" in humans will look like a blister or boil on the skin. The sores can be painful. To prevent infections, protective gloves should be worn when handling infected or recently-vaccinated animals or the vaccine.



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