Infectious Causes of Abortions in Sheep

Expect an infectious cause if >2% of flock aborts.

Diagnosis of abortions

- Submit fetal tissues, blood from dam, placenta.

Best management practices

- Isolate all aborting females.
- Improve nutrition to all.
- Be sure all feeders are elevated.
- Treat females with tetracycline if warranted under veterinary care.
- Completely dispose of all materials associated with aborted births and normal births, including dead lambs by incineration or landfill.
- More than one agent or cause may be active at one time.

Possible Causes:

Chlamydiosis-EAE Enzootic Abortion of Ewes

- Caused by *Chlamydophila abortus*
- Acquired at birth, from aborting ewes, intestinal carriers and venereal spread.
- Will abort at next pregnancy.
- Abort in last two to four weeks of pregnancy.
- Fetus can be fresh, autolyzed, or weak alive.
- Zoonotic disease.
- Placentitis
- Vaccine available, flock treatment available. Consult with veterinarian.

Campylobacteriosis

- Caused by *Campylobacter fetus* or *C. jejuni*
- Spread by carrier ewes in endemic flock and possibly by birds.
- Abort last 4-6 weeks
- Fetus will be autolyzed. Placenta will be normal.
- Vaccine available.
Toxoplasmosis

- Caused by *Toxoplasma gondii*
- Ingestion of oocysts of parasite in cat [kitten] feces.
- Abort any stage of pregnancy.
- Mummification-think toxo first.
- Mummification, resorption, stillbirths, infected weak lambs.
- Placenta will have white 1-3 mm foci in cotyledons.
- Can use serology to diagnose.

Listeria

- Caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*
- Likes cold and dark to grow. Grows in spoiled silage.
- Fetus is septicemic
- Causes retained placenta and metritis.

Salmonellosis

- Caused by any *Salmonella species*
- Causes abortion, stillbirths, weak neonates.
- Ewe will be sick. May die.

Q Fever

- Caused by *Coxiella burnetti*
- Organism can be shed in placenta and birth fluids at normal parturition
- Causes abortion in the last 2-4 weeks
- Fetus will be autolyzed
- Placenta will be thick.
- Can be treated with antibiotics.

Brucellosis

- Caused by *Brucella ovis*
- Usually causes ram epididymitis
- Causes a few abortions, stillbirths and weak lambs.
- Have about 20% smaller lamb crop.
- Results in longer lambing period.
- Causes placentitis.
Leptospirosis

- Caused by *Leptospira species*
- Can be in urine contaminated water or food.
- Causes late gestation abortions with autolyzed fetuses.
- Causes nephritis, hemoglobinuria in the ewe.
- Also agalactia and infertility.

Sarcosystosis

- Caused by *Sarcocystis sporocysts* in canine feces.
- Aborting ewe is clinically ill.

Cache Valley Abortion

- Caused by *Bunyanviruses*
- Has Culicoides and mosquito vectors
- Causes abortions, mummifications, arthrogryposis, hydrancephaly, December and January lambings.
- Can diagnose with serology

This material taken from Dr. Mary Smiths Infectious Abortions in Sheep and Goats-Sheep and Goat Medicine- 2014.