



Fairfield House Veterinary Surgery  
New Town, Uckfield  
East Sussex, TN22 5DG  
Tel: 01825 764268  
Email: [admin@fairfieldhousevets.co.uk](mailto:admin@fairfieldhousevets.co.uk)

## **Worm Egg Counts: Faecal sample collection guide Sheep**

### **What is a faecal worm egg count?**

Some worms that cause disease in sheep produce eggs that are shed in the faeces. By counting these eggs, we can estimate the worm burden in the group of animals and use it to guide treatment. The advantages of this approach include cost savings through avoidance of unnecessary treatments, and prevention of wormer resistance, a growing problem in UK sheep flocks. To reduce costs, samples from groups of animals can be combined ('pooled') to give an average value.

*It is vitally important that the samples are collected and stored properly, to ensure an accurate result.*

### **When should I do a faecal worm egg count?**

We recommend checking worm levels in lambs approximately 3 weeks after turning out with their mothers, and thereafter every few weeks through the spring and summer. For more details, please ask one of our vets.

### **Before you start:**

For monitoring tests, sheep should be healthy and have had their normal access to pasture and/or feed. If they are scouring (have diarrhoea), this may affect the result.

Ensure you have plenty of sampling pots or bags. Pots are available free of charge from our practice. It is important to use proper faecal sampling containers, otherwise the lab will apply a handling surcharge.

### **Taking the sample:**

For a pooled sample, you will need to take 10 individual samples **at random**.

Samples should be fresh dung, less than an hour old. The older they are, the more likely the eggs are to have hatched, making the result appear artificially lower than it should.

There are 2 good strategies for collecting fresh samples.

- Gather the sheep in a small area for a short time, then pick up the samples when you let them out.
- Or go out when they are lying down, and collect samples from the lambs' faeces that are deposited as they get up and move away from you.

Store the samples individually, DO NOT combine them. The lab will combine precisely equal quantities to ensure the result is as representative as possible.

Keep samples in airtight containers, excluding as much air as possible (fill them right to the top! Air encourages the eggs to hatch and then they can't be seen) Deliver them to the practice as soon as you can, preferably the same day but within 48 hours at the latest. If you have to store them before delivery, keep them somewhere cool and dark.

Please note we can only accept faecal samples **Monday to Friday**, as they are sent by courier to an external lab. When delivering to the practice, be aware that we will ask you about the age and number of animals in the group, the condition of the animals, any scouring, and details about any recent worming treatments.

**What about liver fluke?**

Liver fluke eggs can be included in faecal egg count test (for an additional cost) **BUT** this is prone to false negatives (that is when there are liver fluke in the animal but no eggs in the sample). If you suspect a liver fluke problem in your stock, please let us know when you drop off the sample and we may send it away for a further test such as antigen testing.

**Testing for resistance:**

If you suspect you may have a wormer resistance problem in your stock, you should take a sample before treatment and one several weeks after. For white and clear drenches wait 14 days before re-testing. For yellow drenches, wait 7 days before re-testing.

**Results:**

Once the results are back from the lab, you will receive a call from a vet, to discuss the results and advise you on how to interpret them. If you do not hear anything within 5 working days, please call us to follow up.

***KEY POINT: The result is only useful if the sample has been properly collected and stored!***