

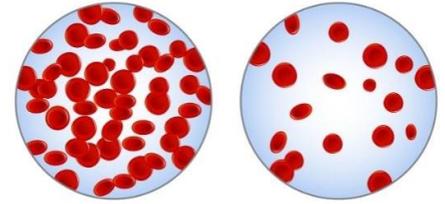


Public Enemy #1

Barber pole worm | *Haemonchus contortus*

The barber pole worm (scientific name: *Haemonchus contortus*) is the most common gastro-intestinal parasite to infect small ruminants in warm, moist climates. It is also the deadliest. Adult worms live in the abomasum (true stomach) and drink blood. Blood loss causes anemia (pale mucous membranes) and sometimes "bottle jaw," an accumulation of fluid under the jaw (called submandibular edema).

Anemia is a lack of red blood cells. It can be measured with a simple blood test called packed cell volume (PCV).



Other symptoms of barber pole worm infection are more generic and include loss of weight and body condition and poor appetite. The barber pole worm does not cause diarrhea like other parasites. It can cause sudden death, especially in young lambs/kids or more prolonged infections that impact performance and may also result in death, if left untreated.

The level of anemia (PCV) can be estimated by comparing the color of the animal's lower eyelid membranes with the colors on a FAMACHA® card. There is a treatment (or non-treatment recommendation) for each color (score, 1-5).



Small ruminants get infected with barber pole worms when they consume the infective third stage larvae (immature form) from pasture plants. Young animals (less than 6 months of age) and nursing mothers are most susceptible; although, any animal that is thin and underfed is at great risk. More animals, small paddocks, long grazing periods, and insufficient pasture rest all contribute to high levels of pasture infectivity and disease outbreaks.



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Many factors make barber pole worms challenging to control. The worm has a short, direct life cycle. The female lays a lot of eggs. The worms can enter a hypobiotic (arrested) state to survive adverse weather conditions, such as a cold winter. The worms have also developed varying degrees of resistance to all of the drugs (called anthelmintics or dewormers) meant to kill them.

Good nutrition, management, and genetics are the best ways to control the barber pole worm. Dewormers should only be given to clinically-parasitized animals when prevention has failed.

