

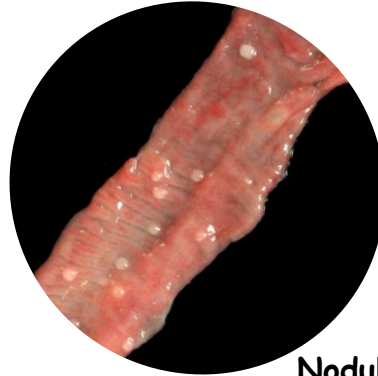
Omnipresent coccidiosis

Coccidiosis is one of the most economically important diseases of small ruminants. It is caused by microscopic, single cell protozoan parasites of the genus *Eimeria*. Coccidiosis should be suspected any time there are digestive problems in young animals that are being raised under intensive conditions (inside or outside).



Oocysts
in feces

Depending on the species of coccidia, infection is in the small or large intestines. The intestinal damage releases blood and causes inflammation of the lining of the gut. Animals lose blood, water, and protein and cannot absorb nutrients as efficiently. Some "recovered" animals remain permanently "stunted."



Nodules in
small intestines



The most common symptom of coccidiosis is scours (diarrhea). Sometimes, smelly, bloody, and/or smeared with mucous. Clinically parasitized animals show symptoms of general ill thrift: lethargy, weakness, anorexia, dehydration, and loss of weight and body condition. Severe infections can result in death. More commonly subclinical coccidiosis results in reduced weight gains.



With few exceptions, coccidia are host-specific meaning there is no cross-infection between hosts. Even sheep and goats are infected by different species of coccidia. In addition, not all species of coccidia are pathogenic.



As with most diseases, it is wiser to prevent coccidiosis than to treat it. Exposure comes from consuming feed or water contaminated with feces and/or living in a dirty environment. Thus, prevention begins with good management, nutrition, and sanitation. There are also additives (called coccidiostats) that can be put in the feed, mineral, milk replacer, or water to help prevent clinical outbreaks. However, to be effective, animals must consume enough of the drugs and be given them several weeks before the risk of heavy exposure.



Seek a veterinarian's help when dealing with coccidiosis. No drugs are FDA-approved to treat coccidiosis in small ruminants. Coccidiosis is usually treated with extra label drugs: Amprolium (Corid®) or sulfa antibiotics (e.g., Di-Methox®).

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