

# Merino Matters



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## BRUCELLOSIS

THERE is a concerning increase in the incidence of Brucellosis throughout the WA sheep flock.

The disease can cause significant economic losses over a prolonged time period and is very costly to eradicate.

It has even been detected in a number of flocks that have been accredited as Brucellosis free.

Brucellosis is caused by the bacteria *Brucella Ovis* which localises in the testis of infected rams.

It is characterised by lumps in the tail of the epididymis at the bottom of the testis.

When infected rams are mated with ewes, low lambing percentages result with late abortions or the birth of dead or weak lambs.

Often the first sign of Brucellosis in a sheep flock is a history of low lambing percentages.

The primary source of infection is in the ram and is spread through a flock by rams mounting each other.

There is limited spread of the disease by rams mounting an infected ewe.

There is no successful treatment of Brucellosis and the only means of eradication is testing all rams and removing infected animals.

Testing involves the taking of a blood sample and analysing it for antibodies in the serum.

Because the antibodies take a period of time to develop, all rams in a group must be tested.

If all the tests are negative and the rams have not had contact with other rams for at least two months, the group would be free of the disease.

However if this group has only recently been isolated, a second test within 30–60 days is required.

Eradication from a flock involves testing and removal of infected rams from the flock which can be very expensive.

Continuous testing and removal of infected rams until two consecutive negative results from all rams will ensure a Brucellosis free flock.

The WA Agriculture Department oversees a Brucellosis Accreditation scheme

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