

scouring of goats

Causes of scouring amongst goats

A sudden onset of scours in a group of goats may be attributable to one, or a combination of causes.

The first thing that springs to mind may be that it is time to check the drench status. The grower should be aware of when the goats were last drenched, with which drench, and when the drench type was last varied. Worms become resistant to drenches so they must be varied every twelve months between the three drench types.

If worms do not appear to be the cause, then maybe the goats have found something tasty that does not agree with them. Overfeeding on lush pasture or, alternatively, acute carbohydrate engorgement (lactic acidosis) may be the cause. A sudden intake of grain or molasses, or other rich food – or even an abrupt change of diet, can cause scours.

The paddock where the scouring goats are feeding should be checked. The remains of particular plants, or the state of maturity of these plants may be a guide to the cause. Maybe someone threw weed waste over the fence?

Some of the nightshade (*solanum*) species, often profuse in the yards and shelter areas, can produce mild to severe scouring, but the plant is usually trampled before it gets out of hand.

Cestrum, Mother of Millions and Rock Ferns will cause scouring and sudden death in goats. When feed is in short supply, the weaker goats in the herd may try these as a food source. Animals new to these plants may try them when introduced to a new paddock, with fatal consequences.

The number, type and maturity of plants that cause scouring in goats are too numerous to cover here. It is up to the goat grower to monitor, and be aware of what the goats are eating. The Rural Lands Protection Board (RLPB), Department of Agriculture and other advisory sources are available, as well as many books for reference.

Other possibilities to consider are diseases such as Coccidiosis, or Yersinia.

Coccidiosis is caused by a protozoa or micro-organism

always present in pasture and in the gut of animals. Under conditions of stress it can proliferate and spread through the herd. Mostly it affects younger animals, and those living in (*temporary*) close or cramped conditions.

Symptoms are usually colic, smelly scours, weight loss and perhaps bleeding in the scours, and eventually death. It is easily preventable with a “coccidia” drench and a short course of antibiotic.

Yersiniosis or yersinia is becoming more prevalent, and again the organism is always present in the pasture. Stress is the usual trigger, and it presents in two forms, the enteric (lingering, depressed state) - and the abortion (fast acting) form. Depression, weight loss, high temperature and a green or dark brown smelly diarrhoea, and eventually death, are symptomatic. Again it is easily cured with antibiotics.

Scouring is only a symptom of an underlying problem. It is up to the goat grower to detect the cause and take action. Loss of condition not only affects the animal, which is bad enough, but it affects the hip pocket of the grower.

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For further information about this problem:

1) **Rural Lands Protection Board** -
<http://www.rlpbns.org.au/>

2) **Department of Agriculture** -
<http://www.affa.gov.au/>

3) **Australian Goat Notes** - for sale through the BGBAA for \$44.00 plus GST

(*not including postage*).

Contact the BGBAA Registrar for your order form.

Phone: 02 6773 5177

Fax : 02 6772 1943 or

Email: boergoat@abri.une.edu.au