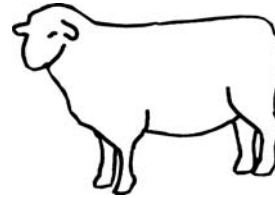


# 4-H SHEEP PROJECT HEALTH SUPPLEMENT



*Publication No. 4H369J*

4-H Veterinary Science project members investigate the normal health of several animal species. It's important that you become familiar with the normal health of your project animals so that you can recognize when one of your animals isn't well.

This sheep project health supplement should acquaint you with common health characteristics.

Think about your ewe, ram, lamb, or wether. You are important to it because it's your job to keep it well and to know when a member of your flock needs veterinary attention.

Recognition of the following normal characteristics will help you and your veterinarian work as a team to keep your sheep in good health.

You should keep a record of any abnormalities which do occur. This record will be important as a case history when your veterinarian begins to formulate a diagnosis. You can create your own chart or use Wisconsin 4-H Publication No. 4H369A.

Your sheep's **attitude** is a characteristic with which only you are familiar. Any change in your animal's behavior may be an indicator of sickness. Does your wether come running at feeding time? Is your ewe a submissive or aggressive member of the flock? A change in this behavior must have a reason. Try to find the cause.

Your sheep's **stance** should be on squarely set, strong legs, and pasterns with heavily muscled rear quarters. Ideally the animal should be long and tall with a straight back. The general appearance should be trim and thrifty. Abnormal stance may be due to poor conformation or may be a sign of illness.

Normal **movement** (gait) is a third characteristic with which you should be familiar. Your sheep should move free and easy with no hesitation (unless she has a stubborn streak). Jerking, limping, or circling are signs of leg, feet, or nervous system disorders.

Sheep can't communicate like people can, but they can be very **vocal**. An ewe nuzzling her young lambs makes soothing, gentle sounds, while a sheep in distress can "baa" very loudly and repeatedly. Learn to distinguish sounds of contentment and fear. Take note if you hear your sheep sneeze or cough. Abnormal sounds may indicate pain or respiratory disease.

A healthy sheep has a good **appetite**. How much does your project animal normally eat in one day? Most sheep prefer leaves and fine stems, so it's normal for coarse hay to be wasted. It's important that you recognize the proper normal condition of your ewes so that you can regulate feed intake appropriately. Be sure to provide fresh water continuously. A normal sheep may eat and drink several times a day. You should be aware of a sudden loss of appetite.

If you're raising sheep for their fleece, their **skin and hair coat** are your livelihood. A sheep's wool coat and how you care for it varies with breed, age, and season. However, any time hair is lost in patches or skin becomes dry and cracked, disease, nutritional problems, or parasitism should be considered. Lanolin in a sheep's wool makes it feel very oily and also attracts dirt. Therefore, a normal, healthy sheep may appear dirty. Some wool breeds should not be washed because washing gives fleece a loose, open appearance. So do a good job of currying and trimming to maintain the fleece.

**Skin and mucous membranes** (color and condition) are important health indicators. Normal skin is smooth and pliable like elastic. Dehydration or water loss may cause "tight" skin. Mucous membranes line all body openings, such as, the eye, ear, nose, mouth, anus, and vagina. Normally, these membranes should be moist and pink. If they are dry or white your sheep may be abnormal.

Some obvious characteristics to notice on your animal are the **bodily wastes or discharges**. Normal sheep feces are pellet-like. Pasty feces may indicate that the sheep needs deworming. This is why lambs' tails are docked. A feces--

coated tail attracts disease carrying insects. You should be able to recognize scours or diarrhea. Waste material with blood, mucus, or bad odor may be a sign of intestinal problems. Your sheep's urine should be clear to yellow in color. Bloody urine is abnormal and your early recognition may prevent serious urinary tract difficulties.

Whenever you see an abnormal sign you can check your sheep's **temperature** with a rectal thermometer. Clean thermometer thoroughly and shake it down well below the normal temperature of 102° F. Lubricate it with KY or petroleum jelly. Be sure your sheep is restrained properly and insert the thermometer into the rectum gently. Wait at least one minute and remove the thermometer. Read it immediately. A normal temperature may vary from 101.5° F to 104° F depending on weather and fleece coat.

The **pulse rate** (heart rate) of your sheep should be strong and steady. It's very difficult to get an accurate count because the rate increases when the animal becomes excited. Place your hand over the heart at the floor of the chest. Feel the beat with your fingers, not your thumb. Your thumb has its own conflicting pulse. Seventy to 80 beats per minute is normal. You may also feel the femoral pulse at the inner thigh of a rear leg.

Hold your hand or a mirror in front of your sheep's nostrils to check their **respiration rate**. Twelve to 20 breaths per minute is normal. Warm weather may cause fast panting. This is a normal process, but a sign to you. You should get your sheep into cooler surroundings if possible.

Practice recognizing common health characteristics on your sheep every day. When you notice an abnormality, contact your veterinarian. Be prepared with a complete report of all the signs you have noticed. A veterinarian calls this a "history."

If you'd like further information on animal health, join the 4-H Veterinary Science Project and you may use your sheep as a project animal.

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