



the isolation of organisms from the placenta or body of a stillborn lamb (store on ice – not frozen- until you can get it to the nearest animal health lab).

To avoid *Toxoplasma* infection (and other problems), cleanliness is important, especially around feeding areas. It is especially important to try to prevent cats from defecating in hay, bedding, grain, or water that will be fed to pregnant animals. Any fetal membranes and dead fetuses should be disposed of properly (burned or buried) to prevent transmission of infection to more animals, and aborted females should always be separated from the flock.

A successful prevention/treatment of toxoplasmosis can be achieved by adding coccidiostats such as decoquinate (Decox) or lasalocid (Bovatec) to the diets of sheep and

Toxoplasmosis:

Common Cause of Abortion in Sheep and Goats

Toxoplasmosis is a disease that causes abortion in sheep and goats. The agent is a common parasitic infection, the protozoan organism known as *Toxoplasma gondii*.

Both sheep and goats can get toxoplasmosis and can experience abortions, stillbirth, fetal mummification, and the birth of weak lambs and kids. Goats also seem to be more vulnerable to *Toxoplasma* infection than sheep. Cats that have eaten infected rodents or birds are a common carrier, with kittens (infected in the womb) spreading the organism in the environment, which is then consumed by sheep or goats.

Signs of toxoplasmosis vary depending on when the female gets exposed. *Toxoplasma* commonly invades the placenta and fetus approximately two weeks after initial infection of the doe. Fetuses infected in the first half of pregnancy are more apt to die than fetuses infected in the second half. If infected during the second half of pregnancy, stillborns or weak lambs/kids usually are the only indications of this disease. The incidence of abortion in a flock is usually low, varying between 1 and 5%, so if levels occur above this, an infectious abortive agent might be the cause. Diagnosis of toxoplasmosis is possible by the detection of high antibody titers in the blood. The most conclusive diagnosis requires

goats (with a veterinarian's guidance if not labeled for such use). Does and ewes previously infected with the organism *Toxoplasma gondii* are likely to be resistant to exposure in

subsequent pregnancies; therefore, the highest risk will be in younger females.

Please note that *Toxoplasmosis* is transmissible to humans, and pregnant women should be especially careful in handling aborted fetal membranes and fetuses (along with cat litter, of course). Infection with *Toxoplasma gondii* during pregnancy can result in encephalitis or blindness in human fetuses. It can also be transmitted to humans via the consumption of sheep and goats milk so care should be taken by pasteurizing or boiling milk before consumption.

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