

Paddock Card - Facial Eczema



Cause: Spores containing the toxin sporidesmin affect the liver and can produce liver damage.

- **When: generally Late-December till Mid-May**
- **Where: Areas with high humidity; dry period followed by rain, heavy dew during warm/hot period**

Although the conditions causing FE were mainly found in the North Island, due to climatic changes FE can be a danger throughout New Zealand, **also in areas not usually affected by it.**

Continuous exposure to low spore levels during the year is equally dangerous.

Start your spraying and zinc treatment about 2 weeks before the FE season usually starts.

PREVENTION IS EASY, TREATMENT OF AFFECTED ANIMALS IS NOT

PREVENTION - 1

- ✓ **Spray paddocks with approved fungicide. Ask your local farm centre what to use.**
- ✓ Spray BEFORE the season starts, fungicides do not kill the spores that have developed.
- ✓ Spray REGULARLY to keep growth under control. Use SPORE COUNTS to check if spraying is necessary again.

PREVENTION - 2

Two weeks before the season starts, feed out zinc. The following methods can be used:

- ✓ Zinc in multi feed nuts
or
- ✓ Drench with zinc oxide
and
- ✓ Feed out paddock hay
[Animals not wanting to eat zinc nuts can be drenched weekly with zinc oxide (readily available in a 2ltr bottle). Zinc oxide can be mixed through hay and chaff as well.]

PREVENTION - 3

- ✓ Take animals off pasture. Feed out hay and other supplements instead.
- ✓ Feed out zinc as in No 2

WARNING:

Never use zinc sulphate in a drench, only use in water troughs. Zinc sulfate and zinc blocks are not adequate as supplement.

SYMPTOMS OF AFFECTED ALPACAS

1. Irritation & restlessness
2. Rubbing face
3. Seeking shade, eyes oversensitive to sunlight
4. Skin swelling, crusting and oozing (head)
5. Thickening of the ears
6. Decreased production/growth rates
7. Sudden weight loss (do regular Body scores)
8. Abortion
9. Death
10. No visible changes (blood test changes only)

FACTS & TREATMENT OF AFFECTED ALPACAS

- ✓ Take off pasture
- ✓ Feed paddock hay, low protein pellets
- ✓ Don't feed out rich food (muesli or grains) or high protein hay (Lucerne) or lucerne pellets
- ✓ Place in shaded area, or dark area when very sensitive to light
- ✓ Green grass increases sensitivity to light
- ✓ Don't abort pregnant females
- ✓ Vit B injection or Vit B supplement can help improve liver function
- ✓ Young animals are more likely to recover

DIAGNOSIS OF FACIAL ECZEMA

Blood test on liver functions (abnormally high)
Symptoms and behaviour

COMPLICATIONS DUE TO FE

Pregnant females can survive on the liver of the foetus. After birth of the cria the female can die if the liver is severely damaged.

Liver function can be restored with correct treatment, it may take up to one year. Regular blood tests are necessary to check liver status.

COMPLICATIONS DUE TO ZINC USAGE

Prolonged intake of zinc can affect fertility (copper deficiency). Zinc prevents take-up of copper. Too much zinc can also lead to pancreatic disease. Ideally Zinc should not be supplemented longer than 3 months, as is recommended for other species. Copper levels to be checked after summer by a blood test if there is a hint of copper deficiency that needs to be topped-up.

SPRAYING

Rotate alpacas. Spray empty paddocks and leave for the time recommended for the chemical, before putting them back in again. Ask your Vet for advice on what spray to use and how it works.

SPORE COUNTS

- To get an idea about the spore count in your area check weekly spore count reports on the web. Google “spore count FE nz” to find the web sites.
- For DIY one needs a microscope, slides (Shoof, other retailers such as vet clinic, farm centers), and some instructions. Alternatively your vet clinic may be able to arrange the spore counting for you.
- Collect grass (1/2 bread bag, or 60 grams) Cut to grazing level (1cm from ground) at several sites. Take more samples if the property has different types of slope and shade.
- Safe counts are from 0-10,000
- Medium high counts are between: 10,000 & 40,000
- High counts are: 40,000 and over
- Finding hot spots. Fungus prefers sheltered, moist areas. In hill country spore counts on north and west facing slopes are usually higher than east and south faces.
- Hot spots with high spore counts can vary every year due to different weather conditions.
- Spores are very microclimate sensitive so may be very patchy in their distribution.

ABOUT SPORES

- Spores can live up to 8 days
- Rain and wind will reduce spore counts
- Kikuyu grass gives less problems
- Like to live in a rich feeding ground, which is dead organic matter. (Paddocks: avoid slashing, keep clean of dead vegetable matter, graze down properly using cattle)

FURTHER FACTS AND MANAGEMENT OF AFFECTED ALPACAS when improving

- There is no specific treatment, but supportive care will help the animal recovering
- The animal will show you when improving
- Zinc intake is not recommended after liver damage has occurred
- Slowly increase intake of green grass (cut some long grass from clean paddock)
- Continue with normal paddock hay and low carbohydrate nuts (check with your feed supplier)
- Discuss vitamin injections and/or other supplements with your vet
- Reduce any stress to a minimum if possible (no shearing, mating, moving, etc)
- Treat any skin disorders if needed with a product that does not contain corticosteroids
- Corticosteroids, such as prednisone, hydrocortisone, cause abortions in pregnant females
- Avoid extra demands on the liver, if possible, by not drenching and vaccinating.
- Discuss blood testing for liver function with your vet to assess progress

ALPACAS ARE HIGHLY SUSCEPTABLE TO FE

ALPACAS THAT HAVE SUFFERED FE ARE EVEN MORE AT RISK

ALPACAS ARE VERY STOIC ANIMALS AND MAY SHOW SIGNS ONLY WHEN DISEASE IS IN AN ADVANCED STAGE: OBSERVE & KNOW YOUR ANIMALS