NADIS
ANIMAL HEALTH SKILLS
Plan for health – get a veterinary health plan

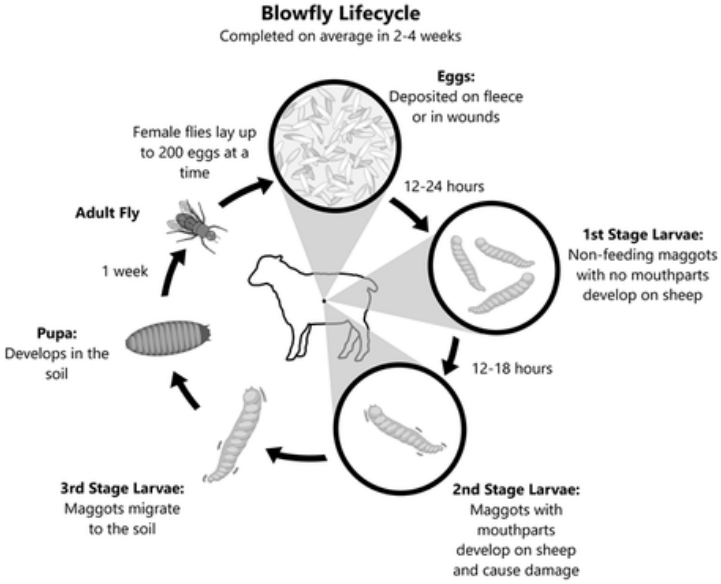
BLOWFLY ALERT

Blowfly Strike is a serious disease thought to affect over 80% of farms in the UK. 'Blow' refers to the laying of eggs by flies and 'Strike' is the damage caused by the larvae (maggots).

THE CAUSE

In the UK, strike is caused primarily by the green bottle fly, *Lucilia Sericata*, which seeks decomposing matter to lay her eggs. Carcasses, dirty backends, foot rot lesions and open wounds attract flies and are all good candidates for egg laying sites.

Female flies lay batches of 200 eggs at each oviposition, so fly populations will quickly increase over a short period of time in the summer months.



THE CAUSE

Blowfly strike has a serious impact on the welfare of sheep within the UK, as well as having a major impact on productivity. Figures from 2015 suggests blowfly strike costs the sheep industry £2.2 million per year.

Losses are incurred from:

- Welfare
- Loss in productivity (weight loss and decreased milk yield)
- Fleece damage
- Deaths
- Treatment costs; including product, labour and time

EARLY SIGNS OF STRIKE

- Irritation
- Nibbling at tail head
- Increased swishing of tails
- Rubbing
- Further signs of discomfort in lame animals

SIGNS OF SEVERE STRIKE

- Discoloured/damp fleece
- Fleece loss
- Separation from flock
- Sick animals
- Death (due septicaemia from secondary bacterial infection and release of toxins)

Untreated strike progresses quickly and can result in the death of affected animals. Damaged skin results in the release of toxins and will attract more flies.

PREVENTION

In order to prevent Blowfly strike, the following steps are recommended:

- **Blowfly alert**
  - Assess the blowfly alert for your region – NADIS produce a dynamic blowfly alert throughout the season based upon meteorological conditions
- **Application of a preventative product** in advance of the main risk period for flies
  - Discuss with your vet or RAMA the most appropriate product, based on labour resources, age of your lambs during the risk period, withdrawal periods and anticipated slaughter dates
- **Reduce dirty backends.** Dagging, crutching and timely shearing are all important.
- **Tail length.** Selective breeding for reduced tail length and reduced wool cover can reduce the risk of strike
- **Control worm burdens**. Reducing faecal soiling will reduce blowfly attraction. Discuss with your vet an appropriate faecal egg counting and parasite control plan.
- **Treat lame sheep promptly**. Flies are attracted to lesions caused by scald and footrot
- **Manage the fly population**: Reducing the fly population early in the year has the greatest impact on the fly challenge during the grazing season
  - Inexpensive fly traps have been shown to reduce strike incidence by 80% in a season
  - Prompt disposal of deadstock
  - Be vigilant in high risk areas of the farm i.e. woods and trees with warmer micro-climates