

Controlling Sore Mouth in Meat Goats

Introduction

Contagious ecthyma, commonly called **sore mouth**, is a contagious, viral disease of goats and sheep known by several alternative names, including **orf**, **scabby mouth** and **contagious pustular dermatitis**. Sore mouth is common in goats worldwide and can produce painful, thick scabby sores on the lips and gums. Goats infected with sore mouth usually heal completely without scars after one to four weeks. However, in severe cases secondary infections may extend that period. Feed intake may be depressed resulting in weight loss.

Sore mouth is not limited to the mouth. A kid with sore mouth lesions can pass the infection to the teats of a doe during suckling. Lesions appearing on udders are painful and the doe may not allow the kids to nurse and may develop mastitis. The disease may also be passed from infected animals to others. In addition, scabs which have contaminated the environment may be another source of infection. Milking equipment and bedding contaminated by infected does are other possible sources of infection. The lesions are crusty, and may be secondarily infected with bacteria such as staphylococci and others. Antibiotics are indicated if secondary infections are severe. Although the lips and gums are most commonly affected, lesions have been reported on the face, ears, coronary bands, scrotum, teats, vulva, neck, chest and flank.

The sore mouth virus is very hardy and persists for extended periods away from the host in the dried scabs from an infected animal. Recovery from the disease gives immunity for at least one year. Transfer of immunity from the doe to the kid through colostrum has not been conclusively proven. Very young kids that are severely affected may die.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is usually based upon clinical appearance. Laboratory tests may be used for confirmation.

Treatment

In mild cases, treatment may not be necessary. Softening ointments may help in more severe cases. It is important to make sure that affected animals are eating and drinking. Soft, palatable feeds may help to keep intake up. Antibiotics may be required if secondary infections are severe. Dairy goats with sores on the udder should be milked last and an antiseptic udder salve applied to control bacterial proliferation until healing occurs.

Prevention

Commercial vaccines labeled for both goats and sheep are available and have been of value in some instances. These products should always be used according to product label direction and after consultation with a veterinarian or animal health expert. The vaccines are unattenuated live virus preparations (basically ground-up scabs) or tissue culture strains. Therefore, vaccinating a clean herd will introduce the disease to the herd, and should be done with full consideration of this fact. Scabs appearing at the vaccination site in 1 to 3 days indicate that the vaccine is “taking.” For goats that are shown regularly, vaccination prevents the occurrence of an outbreak during the show season. However, it is important to vaccinate animals at least six weeks before the show season, so that vaccine scabs will have disappeared before the first show. Following vaccination, at least two to three weeks are necessary for adequate immunity to take place. Animals are vaccinated in a hairless, protected area. Sites for vaccination include the inside of the ear, the underside of the tail, and others.

It may not be a concern to vaccinate pregnant animals because the vaccine reportedly does not induce abortion. However, the stress of herding pregnant animals into a handling facility and vaccinating them could potentially induce abortion in some animals.

Vaccinated does may give some colostral immunity to kids. However, colostral immunity is short lived, and vaccination should focus on vaccinating each new kid crop. In some programs, annual revaccination of late pregnant does is performed along with vaccination of the new kid crop. Disinfection of the pens after all lesions have cleared is recommended in case the owner of an infected herd chooses not to follow a routine vaccination program.

Human Health Concerns

The sore mouth virus may infect man. Persons handling affected animals or vaccinating goats or sheep should wear gloves at all times when handling these animals or the vaccine to protect against acquiring infection.

Summary

Sore mouth is a contagious, viral disease that produces thick, scabby sores on the lips and gums and may also be observed on udders or other areas. Sore mouth usually runs its course in one to four weeks except in cases of secondary infections. Treatment is of little value. Softening ointments and soft and palatable feed may help to keep feed intake up. Commercial vaccines labeled for goats and sheep are available. However, because the vaccine is a live virus product, vaccinating a clean herd will introduce the disease to the herd. Persons vaccinating goats or handling goats with sore mouth should wear gloves at all times.

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Sore Mouth

Here is a link to a video showing the treatment of sore mouth ==> [Video of sore mouth](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz2UPYdRhKo>

Below are pictures of goats with sore mouth and showing us treating the sores when necessary.

- The picture to the far left is of a doe with a mild case of Sore Mouth.
- The next picture is of a doe with a bad case.
- The last two pictures show us putting "Today" antibiotic gel on the sores.



Article from Goat Rancher August, 2001

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ConsiSore mouth is a viral disease that is contagious both to goats and humans. The Causative agent is an epithelotropic parapoxvirus that gains entry to the goat's body via cuts and abrasions. The virus is found worldwide and there is no known cure.

Otherwise known as Contagious Ecthma, Orf, and "scabby mouth", consiSore mouth looks like fever blisters. Generally appearing on the hairless parts of the goats' body. consiSore mouth can also occur on the face, ears and coronary band (above the hoof) of the goat.

consiSore mouth is a life-threatening disease to nursing kids. Infected lips transmit the virus to the dam's teats, making her so uncomfortable that the doe may refuse to let her kids nurse. consiSore mouth is highly contagious Once the virus appears, it is not unusual for most or all of the kids to contract it.

The bad news is that consiSore mouth must run its course and this can be as long as three or four weeks. per animal. The immune animal likely remains a carrier of the consiSore mouth virus and may infect other goats. The good news is that most goats who survive consiSore mouth become immune to it and never contract it again, similar to humans who are exposed to chickenpox. There are steps that can be taken by the goat producer to minimize the discomfort of all infected goats.

The ideal treatment, in this writer's opinion, is the application of Gentian Violet to the affected parts of the animals. Use disposable gloves; humans can catch consiSore mouth. Gentian Violet is an old-time inexpensive purple liquid medication used decades ago for fever blisters and impetigo. It is available without prescription from the local pharmacy, through it may have to be orders by the pharmacist. Genetian Violet helps dry up the blisters and hasten healing. {We, Jack & Anita Mauldin, use a medication with Cephapirin Benzathine. Two brands with this medication are Cefa-Dri and Tomorrow. Spread it on the sores for 3-5 days.}

Drying scabs sometimes contain staph bacteria or screwworm maggots. Gentian Violet kills bacteria that may cause a secondary infection. Systemic antibiotics are recommended if a

secondary bacterial infection exists. The purple color of Gentian Violet afford the producer the added benefit of being able to see which animals have already been treated.

consiSore mouth vaccines are available but their usage is highly debated among goat producers. Because the virus is live, the disease is introduced into the herd. The vaccine is made of ground-up scabs and is applied to a hairless area of the goat after the surface of the skin has been scratched. Within one to three days, scabs will form, signifying that the vaccine has "taken". Goats who do not develop scabs at the vaccination site probably have an immunity to consiSore mouth. Humans coming into contact with the consiSore mouth vaccine usually contract the disease. There is little to no hard evidence that a vaccinated doe will pass any immunity on to her kids, so any argument for transmitted immunity is moot.

Many producers who run animals on large acreage and seldom see them routinely vaccinate against consiSore mouth to reduce the likelihood of losing the kid crop. Goats raised under more "hands-on" conditions usually re not vaccinated. This is a generalized statement but also a fairly accurate evaluation of how this vaccine is used.

Once Sore mouth is on the farm or ranch, it is thee for years. Clean up the pens, pastures and paddocks is sometimes possible by bleaching, burning and allowing the ground to lie fallow for an extended period of time. Of course, the size of the area involved, manpower available, costs incurred, and conditions existing will determine if this practice is practical.

For many producers, a reasonable case can be made to consciously decide not to vaccinate and instead let Sore mouth run its course, using the supportive therapy outlined in this article. This is particularly beneficial if there are no nursing kids in the herd when the infection occurs.

Unless a herd is closed and isolated from other goats, it is likely that at some time in the goat producer's career, they will encounter consiSore mouth. Be prepared to deal with this disease. consiSore mouth is far more manageable than many other illnesses that a got herd might encounter.