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Sheep: identification, records and movement

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To fully understand this guidance, it is important to note the difference between the United Kingdom and Great Britain:

- UK: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- GB: England, Scotland and Wales

In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England

Sheep that were born or identified on or after 31 December 2009, and are not intended for slaughter within 12 months of birth, must be electronically identified and individually recorded in your flock register.

Sheep movements are documented using the Livestock Information Service (LIS).

When moving these animals they must be recorded individually on your movement document*, in paper or electronic form, unless you are moving them between premises that are part of your main holding and within a 10-mile radius of your 'point of business' (usually the postal address of your main animal handling point) or you move them through a central point recording centre (CPRC).

[*LIS-1, which can be downloaded from the Livestock Information website (scroll down the linked web page to access the form).]

Individually identified sheep will generally be your breeding stock but may also be sheep you keep for whatever reason (including as pets) beyond 12 months of age.

You do not need to electronically identify sheep that were already officially identified before 31 December 2009; neither do you need to record these animals individually in your holding register. However, for these animals you do need to record individual animal numbers on movement documents (LIS-1).

There are different rules for sheep destined for slaughter within 12 months of birth. More information on slaughter animals is available on the GOV.UK website.

Import / export

For information on moving sheep into and out of GB, see the guidance on 'Importing animals' and 'Exporting animals'.

You will need to be aware of the identification requirements regarding the GB prefix on ear tags (covered in the exporting guide).

Before moving sheep to your holding

If you want to keep sheep you will first require a county parish holding (CPH) number, which identifies the land where they will be kept. Details of how to apply for a CPH number are available on the GOV.UK website.

Notification of holdings

An occupier of a holding who begins to keep sheep on that holding, and any person who takes over the occupation of a holding where sheep are kept, must notify the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) of their name and address, and the address of the holding. This must be done within one month. APHA should be contacted on 0300 020 0301 or customer.registration@apha.gov.uk. They will provide you with your flock number at this stage.

You must also notify APHA, within one month, if you stop keeping sheep.

When should I identify my sheep?

Lambs born on your holding must be identified within the following timescales:

- within six months of birth, if the animals are housed overnight
- within nine months of birth, if the animals are not housed overnight (kept in 'extensive conditions')

Lambs must be identified before they leave their holding of birth (including moves to slaughter, temporary grazing, common grazing, market, etc) whether or not the six / nine months have passed.

What can I identify my sheep with?

Sheep can be identified with any of the following identification devices:

- ear tags
- tattoos
- pastern tags
- boluses

What is used depends on whether the animal has full electronic identification (EID) or is a slaughter animal. Full EID-identified animals are generally not slaughtered before they are 12 months old; slaughter animals are those that are intended for slaughter within 12 months of birth.

More information on the types and combinations of identification devices can be found on the GOV.UK website.

However, there are different rules that are dependent on when your sheep were born or identified.

Sheep born or identified since 31 December 2009

Sheep born since 31 December 2009 must be fully EID-identified (unless they are slaughter animals) and should have two identification devices, one of which must be electronic.

The identification code on both must contain the letters 'UK' followed by a '0', the six-digit 'flock number' and the five-digit 'individual animal number'. The electronic number on the chip will be identical except the 'UK' will be replaced with '826' (the ISO country code for the UK).

An EID tag must be yellow. A non-electronic identification device can be any colour apart from yellow, red or black.

Slaughter animals should have one single electronic slaughter batch tag. This has 'UK' followed by the flock number printed on the outside of the tag and the individual animal number contained in the electronic chip. It must be yellow to show that it is an electronic tag.

Keepers have the option to fully EID-identify slaughter animals but will then have to follow the recording and reporting requirements of full EID-identified sheep.

Reserved colours for tags, as stated in the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) (England) Order 2009:

- yellow: used only for electronic tag

- black: used only for ear tags where the sheep has an EID bolus and should be marked with the letter 'B'
- red: used only for replacement tags (including replacement electronic tags)

Sheep born before 31 December 2009

Sheep identified before 31 December 2009 are known as the 'historic flock'.

Sheep born between 11 January 2008 and 30 December 2009 were identified by double tags bearing a flock mark and individual number.

Sheep born between February 2003 and 10 January 2008 were identified with a single tag bearing a flock mark and individual number.

Between 1 January 2001 and February 2003, sheep were identified with a single ear tag showing a UK flock mark but not an individual animal number.

Before 1 January 2001, sheep did not need to be identified with a permanent mark.

If any of these sheep lose their tag or need to be moved, you must double-identify them with identification devices that have the same individual animal number.

If a sheep from the historic flock loses its ear tag, current Defra and industry advice is that full EID should be used (see above) as individual animal numbers must be recorded and reported. This isn't a legal requirement, but it will make it possible to gather your animals' individual identification numbers using scanning equipment. There are various options regarding upgrading the identification devices for such sheep. Further guidance on replacing lost or damaged identification devices can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Replacing identification

If your sheep loses its identification device, or it becomes impossible to read, you must replace the device within the following timescales (whichever comes first):

- no later than 28 days after the tag was removed or discovered to be lost or illegible (either visually or electronically)
- before the sheep is moved from your holding

Whenever you apply replacements, you must make a record of this in the replacement section of the holding register.

Where do I record my animal movements and who do I report them to?

When an animal moves, its movement must be reported (on-movements) or notified (off-movements) to LIS within three days, using one of the following methods:

- if you use a farm management package that has been updated, it will automatically report sheep and goat movements on to the LIS system
- if you have internet access, you can report moves on the LIS website
- if neither of the above are appropriate, you can use a quadruplicate paper LIS-1 form. The address is: Livestock Information Service, c/o Defra, PO Box 407, Worksop, S80 9HP. Do not send completed

forms to your local authority

The movement must also be recorded in the holding register. The only exceptions are as follows:

- when an animal that remains under your keepership moves to a piece of land that is registered under the same CPH number as your 'point of business' and is within a 10-mile radius of it
- where an animal is moved to a veterinary practice
- when an animal is moved to common land that borders the holding and is officially linked to the holding
- when an animal is moved on foot to adjacent land that has a different CPH number, but is not used for any other livestock. See the GOV.UK website for further information on how to keep a holding register
- movements between land / buildings associated with your main holding and any temporary land association (TLA). For further information on TLAs see the GOV.UK website

Recording movements and other information in the holding register

The keeper can choose in which format to keep a holding register, as long as it contains the required information and a copy can be provided when requested. Options include:

- a paper record
- a spreadsheet
- using the holding register function in farm management software
- use the LIS system to keep an online holding register. It will automatically update when a report is made of animal animal movements to a holding that also uses LIS

A PDF version of the holding register is available on the GOV.UK website.

Keepers must maintain a holding register, which must include the name of the registered keeper, address of the holding to which the register relates, the CPH number, flock number, species (sheep, goats or other), type of production (for example, meat, wool, milk), and the address of the keeper.

Once a year, on 1 December, you must record the total number of sheep present on your holding.

The following must be recorded within 36 hours:

- application of replacement ear tags
- application of ear tags to young previously unidentified animals (and their year of birth)
- any deaths. On the death of an animal you must record the animal's identification as well as the month and year of death

You must record the individual identification numbers for full EID-identified animals when the animal is first identified, moves to another holding or dies. You must also make a record of the breed (if known).

Slaughter animals' movements are always recorded as a batch or mixed batch (you only need to record the flock numbers of the animals being moved).

For animals born or identified before 31 December 2009 (historic flock) you do not have to record individual identification numbers in the holding register and can continue to batch record them. However, printouts of individual numbers relating to the historic flock, provided by a CPRC, should be cross-referenced with batch movements in your holding register. For more information on CPRCs, see 'What is central point recording?' below.

For off-movements, the keeper may retain a duplicate copy of the LIS-1 document in chronological order with the holding register, instead of entering the movement into the holding register.

For off-movements, keepers are also required to keep a record of the transporter and the vehicle's registration.

On-movements must always be recorded in the holding register.

Movements must be recorded in the holding register within 36 hours of the movement taking place, or within 48 hours if the animals have been moved to or from a central point recording centre (CPRC).

Holding registers, along with movement documents kept as part of the register, must be kept for three years after the last day when an animal referred to on the document dies or leaves the holding.

More information on how to keep a holding register is available on the GOV.UK website.

The examples below show the different ways of recording sheep movements.

Individually

This is where you record the individual identification number of each animal. It applies to full EID-identified animals. For example:

Date	Number of animals moved	Herd mark / individual ID number	CPH / location animals arrived from
01/10/2024	1	UK0123456 00001	01/001/1234
02/10/2024	5	UK0123456 00002 to 00006	01/001/1234

Batch recording

This is where you only record the total number of animals moved. It is used for slaughter animals and for full EID-identified animals where they move through a central point recording centre that is providing you with the individual numbers. For example:

Date	Number of animals moved	Herd mark	CPH / location animals arrived from
04/10/2024	50	UK0123456	01/001/1234

Mixed batch recording

This is where slaughter animals moving in batches have different flock marks. You must record the number of animals that have the same flock mark. For example:

Date	Number of animals moved	Herd mark	CPH / location animals arrived from
06/10/2024	35	UK0123456	01/001/1234
	15	UK0654321	

Note: the leading zeroes in the flock marks in the above tables are only necessary for full EID-identified animals.

Recording movements in the movement document

The LIS-1 document needs to be completed each time animals move to a different holding.

Moves can be recorded and reported in the movement document in two ways: individual recording and batch recording.

Full EID-identified animals born or identified since 31 December 2009 should be recorded individually on your movement document (LIS-1, in paper form or electronically) unless you are moving animals with full EID through a CPRC (see below).

Slaughter animals should be recorded on a batch basis.

You need to record individual identification numbers for sheep that were identified before 31 December 2009 on the movement document. The exception to this is moves to slaughter (direct or through a market), which continue to be batch reported.

How do I record the individual numbers?

For individual recording, it is up to you to decide whether you read and record an animal's individual identification number yourself as it moves off your holding or use a CPRC to electronically read and record the numbers on your behalf. By using a CPRC you avoid having to individually record animals as they move off the holding.

What is central point recording?

This is where animals with electronic identification devices have their individual identification numbers read and recorded on behalf of a keeper by an approved CPRC such as a market or abattoir. You can check with the market or abattoir to find out if it is an approved CPRC.

Further information

Extra information for keepers of sheep can be found on the GOV.UK website.

For information on the welfare of sheep when they are being transported, see 'Welfare of animals during transport'.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

Updated the Livestock Information Service's address.

Last reviewed / updated: July 2025

Key legislation

- Animal Health Act 1981
- Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) (England) Order 2009

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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