businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Sheep scab

In the guide

What is sheep scab?
Examining your sheep
Movement restrictions
Treatment of sheep scab
Sheep on common land
Seizure of unauthorised sheep
Further information
Trading Standards
In this update
Key legislation

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 and Wales

Under the Sheep Scab Order 1997, it is a criminal offence if owners or keepers of sheep fail to treat sheep visibly affected with sheep scab.

Local authorities can control the movement of sheep that are affected by sheep scab, and require treatment of those sheep if necessary.

What is sheep scab?

Sheep scab is an acute or chronic form of allergic dermatitis caused by the faeces of a mite called *Psoroptes ovis*. It causes severe itching in affected sheep if left untreated. Scaly lesions develop on the woolly parts of the body, and sheep often bite themselves and rub against objects to relieve the irritation, causing loss of wool. Untreated sheep may lose weight.

How to recognise sheep scab in your flock:

- Mild to excessive rubbing / scratching against fence posts etc
- Mild to excessive nibbling and biting
- Dirty areas of fleece due to rubbing and scratching, especially with the hind feet behind the shoulder
- 'Nibble' (touch hypersensitivity) response, spontaneous or in response to handling or manipulation of a lesion
- Tags of fleece on flanks due to biting or rubbing (similar to lice infestations)
- Clean areas of fleece due to licking / biting at or near lesions*
- Standing apart from flock, dull and depressed*

[*Only when in combination with other symptoms described.]

Advanced disease:

- Areas of wool loss
- Damaged moist red skin
- Dry crusty scabs with moist red borders

Please consult your veterinary surgeon if you are not sure.

Examining your sheep

Part the fleece in several areas. Suspect scab if you find scales and scabs.

Mites can be seen as moving white specks (just visible to the naked eye) around the edges of the scabby or red area.

Movement restrictions

No person may move any sheep visibly affected with sheep scab, nor any sheep from a flock containing one or more sheep visibly affected with sheep scab, on to or off any premises, except:

- For treatment
- For immediate slaughter
- In accordance with a common land clearance notice
- Under the authority of a licence in writing, granted by an inspector

Any movement of affected sheep must be carried out in such a way that other sheep are not contaminated with sheep scab by coming into contact with them.

Treatment of sheep scab

Treatment and protection:

- Organophosphates (OP) dips
- Synthetic pyrethroid (SP) dips (flumethrin)
- Moxidectin (one or two injections)

Treatment only:

- Ivermectin (two injections)
- Doramectin (single treatment)

Any person who is the keeper of sheep visibly affected with sheep scab must treat those sheep and all other sheep in the flock with a product approved by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

A record must be made of all veterinary medicines administered to food-producing and farm animals. For further information, see 'Keeping veterinary medicine records'.

An inspector may serve a notice on any person in charge of sheep visibly affected with sheep scab, requiring isolation of the animals (or, if they are not on a holding occupied by the keeper, removal to that holding and isolation of that holding) pending the results of testing for sheep scab. This may include other sheep that have been in contact with affected sheep.

If sheep scab is confirmed, a further notice may be served by an inspector requiring the keeper to treat them within a specified period.

Once the notice to treat sheep scab has been served, the person in charge must either:

- Treat the sheep with an approved product
  or
- Ensure that the sheep are slaughtered

The person on whom the notice to treat sheep scab has been served must, within two weeks of the date on which they complied with the notice, send to the inspector who served the notice:

- A document signed by a veterinary surgeon, stating the date on which the treatment took place and the treatment used (and in the case of sheep that are slaughtered, evidence of such slaughter)

If a notice to treat sheep affected with sheep scab is not complied with, the local authority may arrange for the sheep to be treated at the expense of the person on whom the notice was served.

Sheep on common land

(In England and Wales, 'common land' means any common or unenclosed land.)

If a local authority is satisfied that any sheep that is on common land (or any part of common land) is affected with sheep scab, a notice of clearance may be published in writing and publicised in such a way as the local authority thinks fit, in order to draw it to the attention of anyone affected by it.

The notice of clearance may require:

- All persons keeping sheep on the land specified in the notice to move all sheep off the land before the date specified in the notice
- The owner to notify the local authority at least 48 hours in advance of the time and place the sheep will be treated for sheep scab

Any person wanting to move sheep on to land specified in the notice must have:

- Treated the sheep against sheep scab with a product approved by Defra
- Notified the local authority in writing of the following information:
  - That the sheep have been treated against sheep scab
  - The number of sheep that have been treated
  - The date or dates of treatment
  - The product used

- Written authorisation from the local authority to move the sheep on to the land

Once the conditions have been met, sheep may be moved on to the land after the date specified in the notice, as follows:

- **Within three days:** no sheep are to be moved on to the land
- **Three to 16 days only:** sheep that have been treated with an approved product that will give protection against re-infection by sheep scab mites may be moved on to the land
- **16 days to three months:** sheep that have been treated with an approved product that does not give protection from re-infection may be moved on to the land

Seizure of unauthorised sheep

Any sheep found on land specified in a clearance notice that have not been authorised by the local authority may be seized and detained.

If the owner establishes their right of ownership within seven days of the seizure, and pays to the local authority the expenses incurred in seizing and detaining them, the owner may take possession of the sheep.

If the owner of the sheep does not establish their right of ownership, nor pays the local authority the expenses for the seizure and detention of any sheep, the local authority may either:

- Treat and sell the sheep
  or
- Arrange for the sheep to be slaughtered and sell the carcase(s)

The costs incurred will be deducted from the proceeds of sale and the surplus retained for payment to any person who can establish that the sheep belong to them.

Further information

Further information on how to spot and report sheep scab can be found on the GOV.UK website.

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

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: May 2026

Key legislation

- Animal Health Act 1981

- Sheep Scab Order 1997
- Animal Welfare Act 2006

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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