businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Sheep scab

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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 Scotland

Under the Sheep Scab (Scotland) Order 2010, any person who has in their possession or charge any sheep known to have, or suspected of having, sheep scab must notify the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) as soon as possible. Any vet who examines such sheep and believes they have sheep scab must also notify this to APHA.

On suspicion or confirmation of sheep scab on any premises, movement restrictions automatically apply to all sheep on the premises.

What is sheep scab?

Sheep scab is a notifiable disease in Scotland. It 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.

Action when sheep scab is suspected

Any person who has responsibility for, and any veterinary surgeon who examines, any sheep, and suspects or knows them to be affected with sheep scab, must inform APHA immediately by telephoning 0300 060 0704. This also applies to a veterinary surgeon who examines any sheep.

Movement restrictions

Movement restrictions apply automatically to premises where sheep have, or are suspected of having, sheep scab. The restrictions prohibit movement of sheep on to or off the premises until all affected sheep are treated, or a veterinary surgeon confirms there are no affected sheep (or carcases) and APHA has received confirmation of this in writing.

No affected sheep may be moved on to or off any premises, except:

- For treatment

- For slaughter
- In accordance with a clearance notice
- Under the authority of a licence issued by an inspector

The owner or keeper of sheep with sheep scab must take all reasonable steps to ensure the sheep do not stray or come into contact with other sheep.

Treatment of sheep scab

This must be done with a product approved for sheep scab. It is advisable to contact a veterinary surgeon to confirm the presence of sheep scab (as other parasites can give similar symptoms). They can advise on the most appropriate treatment.

It should be noted that some treatments do not give adequate residual protection; therefore, movement restrictions remain in force for 16 days following treatment. All sheep on the premises should be treated.

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 the owner or keeper of sheep suspected or known as having sheep scab, requiring them to get a vet to examine and confirm or negate this. Movement restrictions again apply, as above.

Treatment and control of sheep scab can be carried out by either:

- Dipping
  or
- Use of injectables

Note: pour-ons and spraying / jetting are not acceptable means of treatment.

Treatment and protection:

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

Treatment only:

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

Use of products with a long-lasting and preventative action to both kill mites and provide protection against re-infection is recommended.

Sheep at markets or places of exhibition

If any sheep on the premises are known to have, or are suspected of having, sheep scab, an inspector may serve a notice on the owner or keeper to remove the sheep from the premises to one of the following (as chosen by the owner or keeper):

- A slaughterhouse

- The premises they had moved to the market from
- Other premises approved by the inspector for detention and isolation

Sheep on common or unenclosed land

If an inspector suspects or knows that any sheep that is on common land is affected with sheep scab, a notice 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 may require:

- All persons keeping sheep on the land specified in the notice to move all those sheep off that land before the date specified in the notice
- That the sheep removed be treated
- Notification of treatment at least 48 hours before the sheep are treated for sheep scab. The owner is required to notify the local authority of the time and place that the treatment will be carried out

Treatment and return to common land

No sheep can be returned to the common grazing until three months have passed or all of the following have occurred (whichever is sooner):

- Three days have passed, and the sheep have been treated against sheep scab with an approved sheep dip
- The local authority has been given written confirmation 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
- The local authority has authorised (in writing) the movement of the sheep on to the land

If movement back on to the land is within 16 days of clearance of the land, the local authority must be satisfied that the sheep have been treated with an approved product that will give protection against re-infection by sheep scab mites remaining on the land.

Seizure of unauthorised sheep

The local authority may seize any sheep:

- Found on land specified in a clearance notice that have not been authorised to be there
- Affected with sheep scab where the owner cannot immediately be identified

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 these 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.

Shetland Islands

Additional controls for sheep scab apply to the Shetland Islands under the Sheep Scab (Shetland Islands) Order 2003. This includes all sheep moved to the islands from the rest of the UK being treated for sheep scab on arrival.

Further information

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

The Scottish Government website has information on notifications. APHA maps all reported cases in order to provide an overview of the disease in Scotland.

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 (Shetland Islands) Order 2003
- Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006
- Sheep Scab (Scotland) Order 2010

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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