

Keep it clean

Gina Bromage gives some practical advice on biosecurity during the shearing season.

As the season for shearing approaches, we need to think about keeping the process as risk-free for our animals as possible.

Obviously, it makes sense to arrange handling and penning to reduce stress as much as possible, so that animals are not left waiting any longer than necessary and returned to their groups (even though they may hardly recognise each other) as soon as possible. Shearers and handlers who are gentle and calm with the animals help a great deal as well.

During the TB awareness meetings held earlier in the year, questions on biosecurity relating to shearing came up regularly, but TB is not the only, or even the most likely disease which may inadvertently be spread by shearers.

As always, the key to biosecurity is to think through the routes of transmission of disease. Some equipment, like the shears themselves, angle grinders and padded mats have to be used on successive farms, but where you can have your own dedicated materials, you can decrease the risk of disease transmission.

Disease transmission

The very nature of shearing equipment, where combs scour the skin of each animal, means that they will inevitably pick up skin parasites on them if they are present. It's very important that shearers have an effective means of cleaning their equipment between herds, so that your neighbour's mange problem does not become your mange problem.

Even within your herd, if you have animals with skin conditions, make sure that these are the last to be shorn. You absolutely must, with due courtesy, enquire into your shearer's disinfection protocol. Many of them will have better practices than the ones I suggest here, but it's essential that some measures are taken: You have a lot to lose if you inadvertently bring mange or TB onto your farm.

Unfortunately, shearing equipment and water don't mix well, so after disinfecting combs and cutters in a TB orders disinfectant like FAM 30, they must be dried and lubricated so that they don't rust. Hand pieces should be wiped over with the disinfectant and then with a clean damp cloth to remove it again. Remember

Cleaning/bio security protocol for battery operated cattle clippers
Ideally the carry case and its remaining contents (brush and oil, etc) are not required to carry out the test and it should be left in your vehicle. If this is not possible, it should be stored in a clean area and away from the livestock: After the test:

- Remove the blades (and store in a safe place until ready for cleaning).
- Remove visible signs of dirt/hair from the hand unit and blade plate using a small brush.
- Wipe the clipper unit with a cloth/sponge containing disinfectant (at the recommended dilution), do not immerse in disinfectant.
- Remove the disinfectant from the hand unit with a clean cloth soaked in water.
- Dry hand unit and store in carry case.
- Remove visible signs of dirt/hair from the blades

that FAM 30 is very corrosive, so after it's done its job, it must be rinsed or wiped off so that the equipment is not damaged. Similarly, mats and ground sheets must be treated and rinsed to avoid urine, faeces and spit making the journey from farm to farm.

Heat and drying

The angle grinders or dremel tools used for teeth grinding are a somewhat difficult problem, although arguably more important with regard to TB, since they actually go in the mouth.

The best means of disinfection I can think of is heat and drying, so a hot-air paint stripper played over the parts which will contact the animal should provide protection against transfer of TB. Remember that pasteurisation at 60°C kills TB so it's not necessary to make the equipment glow red, by any means, and take care not to damage any non metal parts. Obviously you need to allow the tool to become cool to the touch before use.

Having your shearer and handlers change clothing and disinfect footwear between holdings is very important, and I would suggest that you consider investing in some overalls, which you can give him/ them on arrival, so you know that they are safe. Similarly, the towels and rags used to mop up should be your own, and laundered before you start. You can quite easily and cheaply supply yourself the bits of poly pipe or twisted towels used to gag mouths open for tooth treatment.

I have reproduced here the Animal Health Office recommended procedures for cattle clippers, kindly supplied by Stephen Gillgan, an experienced AHO who works in a high-TB area of the country.

(the blades are stainless steel and will withstand disinfecting).

- Wash the blades in disinfectant (at the recommended dilution).
- Rinse the blades in clean water and dry.
- Reassemble clipper, oil blades and store.

The blades will withstand autoclaving but this is not generally considered necessary.

Accidentally cutting an animal and BT risk

The spread of Bluetongue if an animal is accidentally cut has been deemed negligible. However we recommend the following protocol is followed:

- Remove the blades from the unit
- Remove visible signs of dirt/hair from the hand unit and blade plate using a small brush
- Clean blades with surgical spirit
- Reassemble the clippers, oil blades and commence testing

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A About The Author

Gina Bromage MA VetMB DVM MRCVS

Gina graduated from Cambridge with a BA in 1978, her VetMB in 1981, and entered general practice, taking her MA in early 1982. After a short sojourn in America, where she passed the National and State Board examinations, she returned to practise in England. Gina's involvement with camelids began in 1999 when her mother purchased seven alpacas. She swiftly joined the British Veterinary Camelid Society, taking every opportunity to expand her knowledge of the medicine and husbandry of these animals.