Sheep measles is the cystic (larval) stage of a dog tapeworm. The parasite confusingly has two names with the cystic stage in sheep called *Cysticercus ovis* and the adult tapeworm stage in dogs called *Taenia ovis*.

Sheep measles cysts are usually found in the muscle of sheep, including the heart. Abattoir meat inspectors detect oval, white/cream coloured cysts up to 12mm wide. If cysts have been present for some time they may become hard (calcified).

### Economic Consequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On Farm</th>
<th>At the Abattoir</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The condition <strong>does not</strong> affect sheep health or production on farm.</td>
<td><strong>Trimming</strong> – cysts must be trimmed from the muscle. This results in a significant reduction in carcass/dressed weight.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Condemnations</strong> – if five or more cysts are found the entire carcass is condemned.</td>
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### How Do Sheep Get Sheep Measles?

Sheep measles occurs when sheep ingest tapeworm eggs from contaminated pastures. For the completion of the tapeworm’s life cycle two hosts are required. Different stages of the parasite life cycle occur in each of the following hosts:

1. **An ‘intermediate (sheep) host’ (or goat)**
   - Sheep are infested when they graze pasture contaminated with dog tapeworm eggs.
   - Once ingested the eggs hatch and the larvae form cysts in the muscle.

2. **A ‘definitive (dog) host’ (foxes are also possible definitive hosts)**
   - Dogs are infested when they eat raw meat and offal containing cysts.
   - In a dog the tapeworm lives in the intestines and produces eggs that are passed out in faeces, contaminating pastures.
Sheep Measles (*Cysticercus ovis*)

**What Might Be Seen On Farm?**
Sheep measles cause no harm to sheep so therefore no signs of ill health will be seen on farm. Cysts may be seen in muscle of home butchered sheep.

**Treatment**
There is no treatment for sheep; control of the condition is based on breaking the sheep-dog life cycle (see below).

**Prevention**

1. **Worm your dog/s** - worm all dogs on the property **MONTHLY** with a tapewormer containing the active ingredient praziquantel.
   - Worming must be monthly (not every three months) as the parasite life cycle is 35 days, worming needs to be before the parasite completes its life cycle to prevent worms laying eggs that will contaminate pastures. Worming monthly is not dangerous to your dog.
   - Worm all farm dogs and ensure all dogs coming onto the property are appropriately wormed (within the last month) - including those belonging to shearers, truckies and other contractors, friends or family who visit, retired working dogs and pets.
   - Ensure you dose according to the weight of the dog. Round the dose up, rather than down, to the nearest practical dose.
   - Every three months swap the tapewormer for an all-wormer containing praziquantel – this will ensure your dogs are protected against other important worms.

2. **Don’t allow dogs to eat sheep or goat meat**
   - Home killing of sheep/goats should be carried out in a dog proof enclosure.
   - Raw sheep or goat meat/offal should not be fed to dogs, instead feed commercial dry dog food.
   - Prevent dogs from scavenging or roaming – when not working tie up dogs or keep in a run or kennel.
   - Clean up and dispose of dead sheep quickly and effectively (only burning or burial will stop scavenging). This will also stop other species (foxes and dingos) becoming infected.

Remember to think long term in the control of sheep measles. After initiating prevention strategies it is likely you will continue to see sheep measles on abattoir reports for some time as the tapeworm eggs themselves can survive for up to 300 days on pasture and once infected, cysts are present for life. Control is achieved with time and persistence.

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**For Further Information**
Contact either Livestock Biosecurity Network’s Dr Patrick Kluver 0499 077 213 or VFF Livestock Biosecurity Project Officers 1300 882 833.