

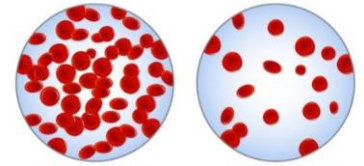


Public Enemy #1

Barber pole worm | *Haemonchus contortus*

The barber pole worm (scientific name: *Haemonchus contortus*) is the most common gastro-intestinal nematode (worm) to infect small ruminants in warm, moist climates. It is also the deadliest. Adult worms live in the abomasum (true stomach) and consume blood. Blood loss causes anemia (pale mucous membranes) and sometimes "bottle jaw," an accumulation of fluid under the jaw (called submandibular edema).

Anemia is a lack of red blood cells. It can be measured with a simple blood test called packed cell volume (PCV) or blood hematocrit.



Other symptoms of barber pole worm infection are more generic and include loss of weight and body condition and poor appetite. The barber pole worm does not usually cause diarrhea like other parasites. It can cause sudden death, especially in young lambs/kids or more prolonged infections that impact performance and may eventually result in death, if left untreated.

The level of anemia (PCV) can be estimated by comparing the color of the animal's lower eyelid membranes with the colors on a FAMACHA® card. There is a treatment (or non-treatment) recommendation for each color (score, 1-5).



Small ruminants get infected with barber pole worms when they consume the infective third stage larvae (immature worm) on pasture plants. Young animals (less than 6 months of age) and nursing mothers are the most susceptible. Thin and underfed animals are also at high risk. More animals, small paddocks, long grazing periods, and insufficient pasture rest periods all contribute to high levels of pasture infectivity and disease outbreaks.

Many factors make barber pole worms especially challenging to control. The worm has a short, direct life cycle, lasting only 15 to 21 days. The female is prolific egg layer. The worms can enter a hypobiotic (or arrested) state to survive adverse weather conditions, such as a cold winter. The worms have also developed resistance to all dewormers and dewormer classes, though resistance varies by geographic area and farm.

Good nutrition, management, and genetic selection are the ways to control barber pole worm infections. Dewormers need to be given to clinically-parasitized animals when preventative measures have failed.

