

Scrapie

Scrapie is a naturally occurring disease of sheep, goats and mouflon, which belongs to the family of diseases called Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs). Scrapie was first reported in sheep in Canada in 1938 and was made a federally reportable disease in 1945 (Health of Animals Act and its Regulations). The prevalence of scrapie in Alberta's sheep and goat populations is likely extremely low, but is unknown.

Causes

Scrapie is believed to be caused by an infectious protein called a prion, which is an abnormally shaped protein. If normal proteins come into contact with 'dangerously' shaped prions, they are converted to the dangerous shape, and sickness and infection occur.

Signs of scrapie

The clinical signs of scrapie include irritation, changes in behavior, posture and movement, weight loss and eventually death.

How it is spread

Scrapie is spread through fluid and tissue from the placentas of infected sheep. It can be passed from a female sheep to her lambs at birth. Changes in the prion protein gene may determine whether an animal is likely to develop the disease when exposed to it. This gives the possibility of breeding for resistance to scrapie in a sheep flock, although resistance may actually be just a delay in the onset of the disease.

Unlike BSE, there is no scientific evidence to indicate that scrapie poses a risk to human health. However, any animal with scrapie or exposed to the disease must be kept out of the food chain.

For more information on the Canadian and Alberta scrapie surveillance programs, or to download the submission forms, please see [National Scrapie Surveillance Programs](#) and [Alberta Voluntary Scrapie Surveillance Program](#) in the Industry Programs section of this website.