



Recent surveys would suggest that 80% of UK flocks will have one or more cases of strike every year. This debilitating and painful condition not only results in a significant reduction in profitability, but also poses major health and welfare issues for the UK sheep industry. It is estimated that around 500,000 sheep will suffer from blowfly strike this coming season.

In the UK, blowfly strike or **cutaneous myiasis** is usually caused by the common greenbottle fly, *Lucilia cuprina*.



Adult blow flies generally feed on plant fluids rich in sugars, but also on any available animal body fluid.

Females are attracted by the putrid odour of rotting, decomposing matter, such as faeces on a soiled fleece, skin wounds, or indeed dead decomposing animals. Foot rot is very attractive prospect for egg laying flies.



Each female will lay up to 250 eggs, hatching in only 12 hours. Blowfly strike outbreaks usually occur in waves. After the first fly lays her eggs, the odour from this strike attracts other flies. The initially small injury

can quickly become larger and deeper. When the population of larvae becomes overcrowded they will attack the living tissue of the sheep and the damage can be catastrophic. The initial signs in affected sheep are a patch of discoloured wool and agitation. The maggots also produce ammonia, which is poisonous for sheep, resulting in depression and severe ill thrift. Secondary bacterial infections complicate and worsen the situation.



Rapid diagnosis and treatment are essential.

After around 3 to 5 days the mature larvae drop off the sheep and pupate in the soil. A new batch of adults will emerge 2 weeks later and depending on weather conditions, up to 7 or 8 generations can be produced over a season. Hot and humid weather strongly supports egg laying activity, whereas windy weather reduces it.

Blowflies are excellent flyers: they can fly up to 10 miles in search for food, or their next victim.



Flystrike can affect various body parts. Most frequent and serious are:

**Breech strike** - Rear quarters of adults or lambs, due to faecal/urine contamination.

**Body strike** - Flanks and the back, due mainly to fleece rot and/or lumpy wool.

**Poll or Head strike** - mainly horned rams. Often a consequence of ram fighting.

**Pizzle strike** - prepuce of wethers or rams.

**Foot strike** – from untreated footrot lesions.

If left untreated blowfly strike is often fatal.



Traditionally, the blowfly strike risk period is between May and September.

Blowfly strike can be prevented through the application of an appropriate product before and if needed during the period of challenge.

When using these products please read and follow the manufacturer's instructions on dose rate, storage and withdrawal periods.

Always check application equipment is working properly and is correctly calibrated, to avoid both over- and under-dosing.

**How to reduce the Risks:**

- Dag lambs to reduce soiling and remove dirty wool from around the breech
- Implement an effective worm control programme, in accordance with **SCOPS** recommendations, in order to reduce the incidence of scour.
- Avoid nutritional upsets and reduce the incidence of soiling by avoiding nutritional upsets causing scouring and have a sound worm control strategy
- Tail sheep and ensure shearing is done before the risk of flies becomes too great.
- Close monitoring of flock, looking for signs of restlessness and irritation. Have the ability to gather, catch and examine sheep easily, if needed.
- Early detection and treatment is vital.
- Dispose of any dead lambs or ewes quickly and correctly.
- Prevention is always better than cure. Use an appropriate product and follow the manufacturer's guidelines for dose and application.

Best wishes,

Ian.



Chemical	Product	Strike Prevention Period	Strike Treatment	Other Parasites covered	Meat Withdrawal
Alpha-cypermethrin	Dysect Zermasect	8-10 weeks	✓	Lice, ticks, headfly	49
Cypermethrin	Crovect Ectofly	6-8 weeks	✓		8 8
Cyromazine	Vetrazin	10 weeks	X	X	28
Dicyclanil	Clik Clikzin	16 weeks 8 weeks			40 7
Deltamethrin	Spot On	X	✓	Lice, ticks	35
Diazinon	Osmonds Golden Fleece	8-10 weeks (not authorised claim, but VLA guide)	✓	Scab, lice, ticks, keds, headfly	49