

## Pinkeye – “Infectious Kerato-Conjunctivitis”

### What is Pinkeye?

Pinkeye is a highly contagious bacterial infection of the conjunctiva of sheep and cattle. The common causative organism is *Moraxella bovis*. Other conditions may lead to a similar appearance, but will have differences in rate of infection and symptoms.

Pinkeye infection leads to considerable production loss through pain, inflammation and vision loss. Severe infection can lead to loss of the eye through perforation of the cornea. Death from “misadventure” or dehydration (can’t find water) can occur as a result of blindness.

### What are the specific things that identify the problem as pinkeye?

- Degree of contagion – true pinkeye is highly contagious, and a few pink eyes in one or two animals is probably not pinkeye.
- Typically both eyes in a single animal. The closest eye for an infection to spread is the other eye in the same animal. Think foreign body (eg grass seed) in a beast with only one eye affected.
- Weepy but typically little pus.
- Dusty conditions or lots of flies about to spread the infection. Also occurs when lot feeding or grain feeding to sheep.

### What are the other things that it might be?

- Foreign body – grass seed. Often only one eye infected, often with pus. Higher incidence in late spring/summer or when feeding grass hay.
- Viral infections – usually eye not pink, as it is really an acute conjunctivitis. Lots of discharge that dries into scab like material. Will almost always have a nasal discharge as well. Diarrhoea and fever common.
- Post infection immune mediated ophthalmitis. An otherwise healthy single animal that has both eyes go totally white with no discharge or pain. The beast will have had a severe infection some weeks previously – sometimes not even noticed. The immune system malfunctions and attacks the cornea from the inside, sending it white.

### How do I manage Pinkeye?

Pinkeye treatment requires antibiotics and protection of damaged eyes to prevent traumatic rupture. Attempts to minimise dust and flies are usually impractical, but suspension of grain feeding for a week might be possible to arrest a winter infection. Isolation of unaffected herds/flocks is imperative, while isolation of individuals within an infected herd will not help a great deal (as there will be undetectable cases that remain infectious in any such herd)

Always check the eye for a foreign body! No eye will get better with any treatment if there is a grass seed left in it.

#### Antibiotics

- Topical – Cloxacillin ointment (Orbenin Eye Ointment, Orbenin Dry Cow, Noroclox DC). A single application of about 1/5 of a tube per eye is often sufficient to treat pinkeye. This is for mild cases. The use of the dry cow preparations with blue dye allows easy visual identification of treated cattle. It is definitely not suitable for sheep as wool staining will result.
- Systemic – Severe cases can be given an intramuscular injection of Oxytetracycline. Long acting forms of this preparation can last for 3 – 4 days from a single dose. Ideal for severe infections or to control infections of such extreme contagion that re-infect treated animals causing an on-going flock condition. Note expense and long with-holding periods on these products.

**Physical protection**

- Eye patches – many forms available. By gluing (heat mount detector glue or similar) a patch of denim or a commercial pink eye patch over the affected eye, physical protection is offered. The eye is also effectively kept away from dust and flies as well. This is very important for severe infections, especially if there is damage on the surface of the eye.

**Prevention – before it becomes a problem**

- Good fly control – Arrest Easy Dose
- Avoid yarding/close contact in dusty conditions – damp down yard before bringing in.
- ADE injection
- Pinkeye vaccination.

**Other management.**

- Ensure blind animals are supported in making water easily available.
- Monitor infection – look for re-infection. Little immunity is gained following infection and cases may re-infect.