
Winter Cooties

Mange, lice, fleas, and scabies can affect animals all year-round. In the winter production animals and pets are more confined in their movements because of weather conditions. They affect animals by making them uncomfortable, suppressing their appetites, and direct feeding on body fluids and skin. Mange and lice are present all year-round and build during the cold weather months, says Dr. Roger Moon, professor, University of Minnesota, livestock entomology.

Lice are most common on mature animals in December through March, with peak populations found in March. They are most often found on the neck, back, hips and around the tailhead regions. There are several species of lice that may affect animals with both chewing and sucking feeding methods.

Chewing lice cause damage by biting hair and skin, while sucking lice penetrate the skin and suck blood. Mange causes dermatitis, hair loss, and scabbed areas on the legs and tail head. Mange increases in the fall, with the most severe problems occurring in winter. Sarcoptic mange, also known as scabies, can be a more serious problem. These mange mites burrow into the skin causing serious lesions on the tail, underline, legs and feet. Animals suffer from intense itching, as well as blood loss and secondary skin infections. Fleas also increase in the winter months when flea eggs have a higher change of hatching and being picked up quickly by the animal. Both the blood meals and irritation affect animal health.

Sometimes older animals never seem to get rid of the last flea and are termed carriers. While this might be possible it is much more likely that the animal owner just has not completely broken the cycle of infection.

It is important that we protect animals from both external and internal parasites in winter, before signs appear and production losses occur. Hair loss, rubbing and scratching are signs of lice and mange infestations. Once you see the damage, you've already suffered a production and health loss. These irritable external parasites burrow into the skin, causing extreme itching and scratching and resulting in reduced appetite and animal condition. If the animal owner is familiar with the problem, then over the counter treatment are available for control of these pests. If you are unsure or do not notice recovery early in the treatment process consult your veterinarian.

A broad-spectrum treatment is a great value because it will control mange, fleas, lice and internal parasites. Be sure to use a product that helps control all of these parasites effectively, and has no meat or milk withholding and is approved for use in lactating dairy cattle. Such a product is worth the investment as it helps increase comfort and improve production. Be sure to treat every animal and at the proper dosage. Be sure treatments are used and disposed of following label instructions.

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