

New National Sheep Health Statement

Q: What is the Sheep Health Statement?

A: The new National OJD Management Plan allows producers to manage their own on-farm OJD risk. A key component of the devised plan is the use of the new national Sheep Health Statement (SHS) as a means of managing your OJD risk when buying or selling your stock.

The SHS consists of a series of Yes/No questions detailing property biosecurity information, flock health history including footrot, lice, Ovine Brucellosis and OJD history including testing and vaccination.

The SHS is a legal document when signed, with the answers provided by the vendor being declared true and correct. Producers are advised to retain appropriate records to support this declaration.

A copy of the SHS can be found on the OJD website (www.ojd.com.au) or by contacting the VFF Livestock Group.

Q: How will a SHS help me when purchasing or selling sheep?

A: The SHS can be used as a risk management tool to help make sound trading decisions. It can offer a level of assurance that the sheep you are purchasing are relevant to your needs.

It will give you an indication of the health history of the flock and if they have been tested for OJD. This will help reduce the chances of introducing disease onto your property. It is up to the buyer to ask for a SHS which can be obtained directly from the vendor or through the selling agent prior to purchase.

When selling stock, providing a SHS will help buyers to make appropriate purchasing decisions, and helps you promote your practices and increase competition.

Q: Do I need to use it?

A: The SHS is not compulsory for trade within Victoria; however its use is strongly recommended and may be required for interstate trade.

A completed SHS is mandatory for trade interstate into South Australia and Tasmania.

All sheep entering NSW must be accompanied by a completed SHS which is required as a vendor declaration for footrot.

Q: Is a SHS required when showing sheep?

A: A completed SHS may be a requirement for attendance at some shows; however individual show societies are responsible for determining their show entry requirements.

Victorian sheep are permitted to attend a South Australian show or breeding centre but must be housed, fed and watered separately from all other livestock at the venue. All sheep must return directly to their Victorian property and must be accompanied by a SHS.

Q: Do I need to answer every question?

A: When using a SHS as a trade entry requirement, all questions should be completed as ability to trade into some regions may be compromised if the form is not fully completed.

Q: What is biosecurity?

A: Biosecurity is a broad term describing the measures taken to prevent and manage the risk of introducing and spreading diseases and pests, which ultimately protects the community, environment and economy.

Implementing biosecurity measures or a biosecurity plan helps to reduce the risk of introducing disease and pests to your farm, increases productivity and allows early detection and management of diseases and pests. Strategic biosecurity management can potentially reduce the impact and cost if there was an outbreak of disease, as biosecurity practices may result in faster detection and management.

Q: What is a Regional Biosecurity Plan?

A: A Regional Biosecurity Plan (RBP) is a set of guidelines and practices that a group of producers implement to prevent the introduction of disease into a flock or onto a property. These guidelines and practices may include movement restrictions into the area, vaccine policy and actions to be taken if disease is detected.

Q: What is SheepMAP?

A: SheepMAP is a voluntary program developed to aid in the control of OJD in Australia. It offers a higher level of quality assurance as SheepMAP producers have been regularly checked for OJD and the flock is generally considered low risk.

Producers should note that there will be a review of SheepMAP in 2013/14 and elements of this program may be subject to change.

Q: How can I test my sheep for OJD?

A: There are a few tests which are routinely used. This includes the PFC350 test and abattoir surveillance testing (Abattoir500, Abattoir150). Blood testing is not routinely used however, may be a requirement for some export markets such as China.

A Pooled Faecal Culture (PFC) test involves testing 350 representative sheep, over 2 years of age in pools of up to 50 sheep (seven samples from pools of 50 sheep). PFC tests can take up to three months to return negative results. In smaller flocks, you will need to test all sheep over 2 years of age. The sheep tested must have been on the property for at least 2 years. To arrange a PFC350 contact a MAP approved veterinarian, who can provide a quote.

The HT-J350 test can return results quicker than the PFC350 test which can take up to three months to return negative results.*

Abattoir 500 test involves abattoir surveillance of at least 500 sheep in one or more lots, over 2 years of age and from the same property. The sheep must have been submitted to an abattoir in the past 24 months and have been on the property for at least 2 years.

Abattoir 150 involves surveillance of at least 150 sheep, over 2 years of age that have been submitted to an abattoir in the past 12 months and have been on property for at least 2 years.

To arrange an inspection at your abattoir, contact Rob Suter, Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries, (03) 9217 4109.

Q: Will vaccinated sheep test positive for OJD when blood testing?

A: The most common blood test used is the ELISA test which tests for antibodies in the blood. When an animal comes into contact with the OJD bacteria (*Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*) the body will naturally develop antibodies against the disease. When an animal is vaccinated with Gudair® the body will generate a cell-mediated immune response and a humoral response, also developing antibodies a part of its immune defence against OJD.

If antibodies are detected then the sheep will test positive for OJD. Unfortunately, the test cannot distinguish between antibodies developed from an OJD infection and antibodies develop from vaccination. All sheep vaccinated with Gudair® must be tagged with a V-tag for this reason. The State Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) must approve blood testing before use.

Q: Section C3- Why might a flock be suspected of being infected with OJD?

A: A flock may be suspected of being infected with OJD if the owner has reason to believe that the flock has been exposed to OJD via;

- trace back or trace forward contact with an infected flock,
- contact with OJD contaminated land or facilities,
- a positive Johne's disease screening test, e.g. abattoir monitoring or blood (ELISA) test,
- is a neighbour of an infected flock unless there is an effective biosecurity barrier,
- clinical signs of OJD, or
- advice from the relevant state agricultural department,

AND the flock has not met the requirements for resolution of suspicion in accordance with the OJD Standard Definitions, Rules and Guidelines (SDR&Gs).

Infected or suspected to be infected sheep cannot be sold into South Australia as breeding stock.

**At the time of printing, the guidelines for the use of this test were being finalised. As information is finalised it will become available on www.ojd.com.au*

Q: What is trace back or trace forward?

A: Trace back refers to an animal or animals that have been sold to another property and are subsequently confirmed as being infected.

Trace forward refers to the purchase of an animal or animals from a flock which is subsequently identified as being infected.

There is no specific time period for tracing suspect infections. For example, sheep purchased from a known infected flock ten years ago will still be considered as suspect unless the suspect status has been resolved in accordance with the SDR&Gs.

Q: How do I know if my neighbour has been infected with OJD?

A: In Victoria, if a neighbour has been confirmed as having OJD then this is confidential between DEPI and the owner. There is no legal obligation for a producer to inform his/her neighbour of a confirmed OJD case. For this reason, all producers are encouraged to have an effective biosecurity barrier.

Q: What is considered an effective biosecurity barrier?

A: There are no set criteria under the SHS for what is considered an 'effective biosecurity barrier'. The new OJD Management Plan puts a greater emphasis on producers taking responsibility for biosecurity and disease risk management.

Examples of good biosecurity practices include;

- using a SHS
- maintaining boundary fences in good order to prevent stock straying onto your property
- developing a stray stock management plan with your neighbors for stock that may stray onto or off your property
- Isolate introduced stock from the existing flock for at least 10 days and monitor for disease
- control where people enter your property by limiting entry points and lock restricted entry gates.
- fence off water ways which can play a role in disease spread from neighboring properties.

More information on farm biosecurity can be obtained on www.farmbiosecurity.com.au or by contacting the VFF Livestock Group on 1300 882 833.

Q: What are the National OJD Standard Definitions, Rules and Guidelines (SDR&Gs)?

A: SDR&Gs are a set nationally accepted standards and practices upon which the States, Territories and Industry develop disease management programs based on their situations.

Q: What requirements in accordance with the SDR&Gs need to be met in order to be cleared as being an OJD infected flock?

Flocks that are infected with OJD are no longer regarded as infected when:

- The whole flock consists of Approved Vaccinates and has undertaken a Faecal (PFC) 350 Test with negative results, at a minimum of 2 years after the last known detected infected animal has been removed; or
- A destocking /decontamination program approved by the CVO of the jurisdiction has been completed.

Q: What requirements in accordance with the SDR&Gs need to be met in order to be cleared as being an OJD suspected of being infected flock?

A: For a flock to no longer be considered 'suspected of being infected' the flock must comply with one of the following;

- Suspicion has been removed to the satisfaction of the Chief Veterinary Officer; or
- The whole flock has been submitted to a Faecal (PFC) 350 test with negative results, at a minimum of 2 years after the last known suspected of being infected or detected infected animal has been destocked; or
- A destocking /decontamination program approved by the CVO of the jurisdiction has been completed.

Q: Section C4 refers to 'T' tagged lambs. Are 'T' tags a requirement for trade?

A: NLIS 'T' tags represent terminal lambs which are sent to slaughter before they cut their first permanent teeth. 'T' tags are not mandatory for the trade of terminal lambs within Victoria but may be a requirement for interstate trade.

Terminal lambs entering South Australia must be identified by a 'T' tag.

Q: Section C5 refers to 'Approved vaccinates' which applies to sheep vaccinated between 4 to 16 weeks of age. Can sheep be vaccinated at an older age or is the vaccine less effective in older sheep?

A: Older sheep can still be vaccinated with Gudair® however, they will not be considered 'approved vaccinates' unless the sheep are from;

- a SheepMAP flock, or
- a flock that has achieved a negative PFC350 test in the past 24 months prior to vaccination, or
- a flock that had a negative Ab500 status at the time of vaccination.

Sheep vaccinated with Gudair® over the age of 16 weeks may still be protected, providing they have not been exposed to the OJD bacteria prior to vaccination. Young animals are most susceptible to the disease. Therefore, it is important that animals are vaccinated early enough to avoid contracting the disease as sheep might not show clinical signs until two years of age. Sheep may shed the virus long before clinical signs are observed.

For vaccine uptake to be successful and to get the maximum protection the vaccine can offer, animals should be vaccinated according to label directions.

For more information on farm biosecurity or OJD, visit the VFF website www.vff.org.au to download the Livestock Group's animal health and biosecurity resources.