

# THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS



## Department of Agricultural Resources

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## SCRAPIE FACT SHEET

### **What is scrapie?**

Scrapie is fatal, degenerative disease that affects the central nervous system of sheep and goats. It is classified as a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE).

### **Is there a cure for scrapie?**

No. There is no cure or treatment for scrapie.

### **What causes scrapie?**

The cause is believed to be a prion similar to Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE) in cattle.

### **How is scrapie transmitted?**

It is believed that scrapie is most commonly transmitted from the ewe to her offspring and other lambs through contact with the placenta and placental fluids.

### **What are the clinical signs for animals infected with scrapie?**

Death is inevitable for animals infected with scrapie. Clinical signs develop slowly and vary among individual animals. Animals may experience the following:

- Weight loss despite retention of appetite
- Behavioral changes
- Itching and rubbing
- Wool pulling
- Biting of feet and limbs
- Lip smacking
- Loss of coordination
- High-stepping gait of forelimbs
- Hopping like a rabbit
- Swaying of back end
- Increased sensitivity to noise or movement
- Tremor
- Down, unable to stand
- Weakness, difficulty getting up
- Death

### **What should be done if my goats or sheep present with clinical signs of scrapie?**

Contact your veterinarian. One or more of the clinical signs of scrapie may be associated with other diseases.

### **How long after the onset of clinical signs does the infected animal live?**

After the onset of clinical signs of scrapie the animal may live from 1 to 6 months.

### **Why is it important to eradicate scrapie?**

Infected flocks that contain a high percentage of susceptible animals can experience significant production losses. Over a period of several years the number of infected animals increases, and the age at onset of clinical signs decreases making these flocks economically unviable. Female animals sold from infected flocks spread scrapie to other flocks. The presence of scrapie in the United States also prevents the export of breeding stock, semen, and embryos to many other countries. TSEs are the subject of increased attention and concern because of the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle, the link between BSE and variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) in people, and feline spongiform encephalopathy (FSE) in cats in Europe. Scrapie has significantly impacted the sheep industry costing an estimated \$20 million a year in direct losses and millions of dollars more in lost potential markets and flock productivity.

### **Does scrapie pose a human health risk?**

There is no scientific evidence to indicate that scrapie poses a human health risk but it should be noted that the sheep industry suffers severe economic losses as a result of scrapie.

### **Do sheep and goats require identification?**

Yes. The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Scrapie Emergency Order 1-AH0-06 mandates that all sheep and goats shall be officially identified at the first time there is a change of ownership, or at 18 months of age (as evidenced by the eruption of the second incisor), whichever occurs first. It should be noted that the Order has been put into effect to ensure Massachusetts remains compliant with USDA requirements and that without the Order sheep and goats would not be allowed unrestricted movement out of Massachusetts. Official identification shall be defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) publication Scrapie Eradication Uniform Methods & Rules, or other means as approved by USDA for this purpose, and shall ensure that all individual animal can be traced to its flock of birth.

### **What does the Scrapie Eradication Program Include?**

USDA has initiated an accelerated scrapie eradication program. Identification is mandatory under the eradication program. The key concepts of the program include:

- a) Identification of preclinical infected sheep and goats through live animal testing and active slaughter surveillance.
- b) Effective tracing of infected animals to their flock/herd of origin made possible as a result of the identification requirements.
- c) Providing effective genetic based flock cleanup strategies that will allow producers to stay in business, preserve breeding stock and remain economically viable. APHIS provides the following to exposed and infected flocks/herds that participate in cleanup or monitoring plans:
  - i) Indemnity for high risk, suspect and scrapie positive sheep and goats which owners agree to destroy.
  - ii) Scrapie live animal testing.
  - iii) Genetic testing.
  - iv) Testing of exposed animals that have been sold out of infected and source flocks/herds.

To effectively operate the program, cooperation is needed among producer organizations, allied industries and governmental agencies.

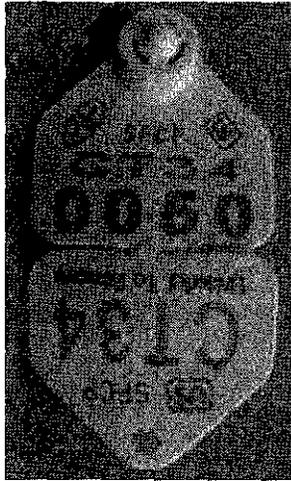
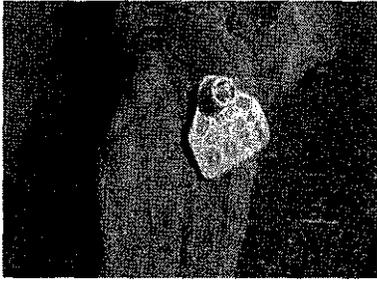
### **What does the Scrapie Certification Program include?**

The certification program is voluntary, cooperative effort among producers, allied industry representatives, accredited veterinarians, state animal health officials and USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The program provides participating producers with the management options designed to protect their sheep from scrapie and to enhance the marketability of their animals through certifying their origin in scrapie free- flocks.

### **Is Scrapie a reportable disease?**

Yes. Confirmed scrapie diagnosis should be reported to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (617) 626-1795 or to the USDA, APHIS, VS- New England (508) 865-1421.

Free Ear Tags are Available To Producers: Call 866-USDA-Tag 866-873-2824



There are many tag styles, shapes, colors and materials. Look for the 3 identifiers of official identification:

US Shield

Flock ID Number

Individual Animal ID

United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Veterinary  
Services 160 Worcester Providence Road, Sutton, MA 01950

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**Health certificates and official identification are required for moving sheep and goats interstate.**

**For Massachusetts laws and regulations governing the interstate movement of sheep and goats, please call the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources at (617) 626-1795.**