



The WeCAHN Small Ruminants Network had its quarterly meeting on September 4th, 2025, to review major animal health developments in Western Canada from April to June 2025. The session brought together veterinarians, laboratories, researchers, and industry representatives. Data were synthesized from clinical impression surveys completed by practitioners and laboratory submissions from Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS), Manitoba Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS), and the University of Calgary Veterinary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).

1) Interesting Cases

Sudden mastitis death in a pet goat

A Nigerian Dwarf goat from a small herd developed a **severe udder infection (mastitis)** and died quickly, despite treatment. Testing showed multi-organ infection caused by antibiotic-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* bacteria. While *E. coli* and *Staphylococcus aureus* usually cause mastitis in goats, this case shows that unusual bacteria can sometimes lead to fatal infections. Hygiene, wound care, and monitoring for early signs of udder problems are key.



Young lambs with neurological illness

A start up small flock lost several lambs showing signs such as lying down, stiff necks, and seizures. Necropsy results suggested enterotoxemia and polioencephalomalacia (“polio”), likely linked to nutrition and feeding management. Veterinarians recommended improving nutrition for ewes and lambs, ensuring good colostrum intake, and following vaccination and parasite control plans before attempting to expand the flock. The case also pointed out that new farmers often rely on social media for advice, which may be misleading—using trusted veterinary and industry sources is strongly encouraged.



Salt toxicity in sheep

Another flock had adult sheep showing neurological problems such as circling, star gazing and sudden death. The flock didn’t respond to treatment for *Listeria*. Testing showed high salt levels in the brain, suggesting salt toxicity or water deprivation rather than infection. This finding is important because neurological signs caused by salt toxicity or water deprivation look very similar to signs of listeriosis or polio. Sheep can become ill after only one or two days without water, so reliable access to fresh water is essential.

3) Syndromic Surveillance

Respiratory illness in sheep and goats remained uncommon this quarter, though labs noted a few more detections of certain bacteria and viruses: *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (*M. ovi*), which can cause coughing and pneumonia in sheep, was higher than normal this quarter

Digestive disorders like diarrhea were rare, but internal parasites (strongyles) continue to be common. Testing for Johne's disease (MAP) in sheep and goats remained stable, with no unusual increases.

Reproductive losses were low this quarter. In goats, several abortions were linked to vitamin E and selenium deficiency, and in sheep, cases were caused by *Chlamydia*, *Toxoplasma*, and *Coxiella* (Q fever). A few cases of mastitis were identified, mostly mild infections caused by *Staphylococcus* or *Bacillus* bacteria.

Cases of emaciation (extreme malnutrition) were seen slightly more often than in previous quarters, often linked to underfeeding or illness.

While neurological diseases were not commonly reported by veterinarians, lab data showed a small increase in confirmed **polioencephalomalacia** in sheep. Skin problems such as lice and fungal infections were rarely reported.

Caseous lymphadenitis (CLA), a contagious bacterial infection that causes abscesses in lymph nodes, remained common across western Canada in both sheep and goats.

Other bacteria such as *Trueperella pyogenes* and *Streptococcus ovis* were detected occasionally, but not at unusually high levels.



4) Broader Animal Health Issues and Updates

A Saskatchewan study by Dr. Van Donkersgoed (2025) showed that having two lambs per ewe is ideal for both animal health and farm sustainability. While producers hoped that more lambs per ewe would increase profit, the study found that triplets and larger litters often result in smaller lambs, higher mortality, and more work for farmers.

With rendering companies in Alberta no longer accepting sheep, producers are turning to on-farm disposal methods such as composting or incineration. Proper disposal is important to prevent disease spread and protect wildlife.

The New World Screwworm, a fly whose larvae eat live flesh, has moved north from South America into Central America and Mexico. Cases increased dramatically from 25 in 2022 to 6,500 in 2023 in Panama, with the first Mexican cases in late 2024. Although the parasite is unlikely to survive Canadian winters, it could appear in imported or traveling animals during summer months. Treatment requires physically removing larvae, cleaning wounds, and using special larvicide products. Producers should check animals returning from the U.S. or Mexico and contact a veterinarian immediately if suspicious wounds are found.

The H5N1 avian influenza (bird flu) virus continues to affect both poultry and dairy cattle in North America.

- In Canada, all 5,600 cow milk samples tested this quarter were negative for the virus. No cases of avian influenza have been detected in Canadian cattle.
- In the U.S., over 1,000 dairy herds in 17 states have been affected since early 2024.
- An early start of avian influenza has affected commercial poultry farms in most Canadian provinces and several US states.
- No new human cases were reported since April 2025 in the US. The total is 70 cases.

Producer Takeaways:

1. Monitor feed quality and ensure your animals have constant access to high quality water. Many diseases are linked to nutrition or water access.
2. Follow science-based resources, not social media advice. Reliable veterinary and industry information prevents costly mistakes.
3. Proper carcass disposal is critical to keeping farms and wildlife healthy.
4. Stay alert for emerging threats such as the New World Screwworm and avian influenza, which could affect Canadian livestock.

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