

Animal welfare

Ensuring all animals receive appropriate care



July 2018

Sheep shearing wounds

Shearing is a stressful procedure for sheep and can result in painful wounds to the skin around the neck, armpits, belly, groin or hamstrings.

Shearing wounds can be caused by:

- inexperience
- time pressure
- inadequate equipment
- sudden movement of the sheep
- wrinkling of the skin surface.

Skin wounds which are smaller than 3cm normally self-heal, but wounds which are larger than this may require stitching using a straight or double curved needle and extra strong cotton.

Stitching large skin wounds speeds up the healing process, but there is a risk of wound breakdown.

Wound breakdown is when the wound does not heal and exposes the animal to possible infection or flystrike. This can result in a decrease in productivity, weight loss and the potential death of the animal.

Wound breakdown can be caused by:

- dirt and bacteria entering the wound site from the shearer's hands, needle, cotton, wool or environment, resulting in a bacterial infection
- poor stitching technique. For example, using a running stitch with wide spacing (more than 3cm) between stitches, stitching multiple layers together using one stitch, or poor knotting.
- the animal's inability to fight infection due to stress or emaciation.

Prevention of wound breakdown in sheep shearing wounds

Shearers should take care to avoid causing shearing wounds. When stitching a large shearing wound, shearers can minimise the risk of contamination and assist the healing process by taking the following steps:

- Keeping needles and cotton in antiseptic solution
- Washing the wound site and your hands with a suitable antiseptic solution
- Keeping stitches less than 3cm apart
- Spraying the stitched wound with a suitable antiseptic spray
- Marking the sheep so it can be easily identified and the healing wound can be assessed. Usually, a wound is completely healed between two and four weeks, depending on its size and location.

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Examples of shearing wound breakdown

Severe wounds that involve more than the skin layer (deep hamstring wounds or open belly wounds) and wounds to sensitive areas (the pizzle and teats) are painful and stitching must not be attempted. Seek immediate veterinary advice or humanely euthanase the animal.

Sheep suffering pain or distress from any severe wounds or wound infections must not be transported. If you are unsure whether or not the animal is fit to load, seek veterinary advice.

Failure to comply with such advice or transporting an injured animal may be an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*.

For more information, visit agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare