

Corneal Ulcers in Small Ruminants

What Are Corneal Ulcers?

- Corneal ulcers, also called ulcerative keratitis, are common in livestock species. This condition occurs when the cornea becomes inflamed.
- These ulcers can be caused by things like trauma to the eye, foreign bodies under the lid, and infectious agents.
- When caused by an infectious agent, it is also called infectious keratoconjunctivitis, pink eye, or infectious ophthalmia.
 - » Some infectious agents are *Chlamydia pecorum*, *Mycoplasma* spp., *Moraxella ovis*, *Coleiота conjunctivae*, and *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Diagnosis

Symptoms of corneal ulcers include:

- Watery eye
- Pain
- Intolerance to light
- Corneal edema (swelling)
- Conjunctivitis

Presence of these symptoms should make a diagnosis of corneal ulcers easy. Animals will typically be in obvious distress. They will excessively squint and blink. The sclera (white of the eye) will also appear very red. In severe cases, animals will exhibit temporary blindness.

Prevention

It is more difficult to prevent corneal ulcers than some other ailments, but you can take some steps to reduce their occurrence.

- Keep barns clean and free of debris that can get into the eye.
- Monitor your animals for any signs of distress or infection of the eye.

If the ulcer was caused by infection, early intervention and treatment with antibiotics can prevent severe, irreparable damage to the eye.

Reference

Angelos, J. A. (2024). Infectious keratoconjunctivitis in cattle and small ruminants. *MSD Veterinary Manual*. <https://www.msdveterinary.com/eye-diseases-and-disorders/infectious-keratoconjunctivitis/infectious-keratoconjunctivitis-in-animals>



Corneal ulcers in sheep and goats cause severe pain, with symptoms including intense eye-squinting, tearing, redness, and cloudiness. These injuries, often caused by trauma or infections, can progress rapidly, leading to permanent blindness, eye rupture, or loss. Treatment typically requires urgent veterinary care, including antibiotics and pain relief. (Photos by Susan Schoenian, Sheep and Goat Specialist Emeritus, University of Maryland)

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