

Q&A to aid fallen stock collectors explain the importance of testing fallen sheep and goats for scrapie

1. Why are animals tested for scrapie?

The UK is required by law to test for scrapie, and each year, defra must sample:

- 15,000 fallen sheep aged over 18 months
- 500 fallen goats aged over 18 months
- Plus 5,000 healthy sheep at slaughterhouses

Animals may be selected as part of the national surveillance programme for scrapie. Classical scrapie is an infectious fatal brain disease that affects sheep and goats, whereas atypical scrapie is considered a spontaneous, non-contagious disease.

Although cases of classical scrapie are rare, continued surveillance remains important for disease monitoring and supporting international trade. Our last classical case (in 2025) had a huge impact on our trade with China.

2. What happens if we don't achieve the sampling requirements?

Failure to obtain sufficient sheep and goat samples impacts the programme's ability to meet legislative requirements, which may lead to enforcement action to ensure participation. It could also have wider consequences for the whole sector, animal health policy and international trade, such as:

- Reduced confidence in disease status of UK sheep and goat populations
- Risks to domestic trade and access to EU and third country export markets
- Loss of value across the whole sheep supply chain as customers lose confidence
- Reduced ability to detect disease early and mitigate potential impacts
- Cause a significant gap in our understanding of the prevalence and status of scrapie in Great Britain, undermining our ability to demonstrate surveillance effectiveness and provide assurance on public safety

3. Why was my animal selected?

Animals are selected at random from those collected through the normal fallen stock process. Your animal may have been chosen because it:

- Was over 18 months of age
- Was in a condition suitable for sampling
- Had a readable ear tag for identification

Selection does **not** mean your animal is suspected of having scrapie.

4. I sell my animals locally and they are not exported, why does this matter to me?

Even if you do not export animals yourself, sheep products could be exported later by the abattoir or food business.

Testing for scrapie protects the reputation of UK sheep products and helps facilitate valuable export markets for items such as raw wool, and other products with little domestic demand such as offal, sweetbreads and horns.

These 'fifth quarter' products generates millions of pounds in additional value for the sheep industry. For example, exports of sheep offal alone were worth £12.9 million in 2025, with the value increasing further in 2026. ([Sheep meat trade | AHDB](#)).

5. What happens during testing?

1. The fallen stock collector identifies animals that may be suitable for sampling – this may be a zip lock or band around the animals leg.
2. At the disposal site, a proportion of eligible animals are selected at random.
3. A sample is taken and sent to a laboratory for testing, and the rest enters the normal disposal route.

6. Is there any additional cost?

No, farmers continue to pay the normal costs of collection and disposal. Defra covers all costs associated with sampling and laboratory testing.

7. Why is this important?

The surveillance programme helps to:

- Meet legal requirements for monitoring scrapie.
- Maintain confidence in the health of the national flock.
- Provide valuable information about the occurrence of disease in sheep and goats.
- Supports vital domestic and international trade and export markets.
- Industry support is essential to ensure the UK continues to meet its surveillance targets.

8. What happens if a positive result is found?

Cases of Classical scrapie are uncommon due to longstanding disease control measures. If Classical scrapie is confirmed, the source of the animal will be traced and restrictions placed on the farm.

- In England, detection of Atypical scrapie no longer results in APHA placing restrictions on the holding. You can continue to trade as normal.
- Rules for farms in Wales and Scotland are different
- Any follow-up action would be managed by APHA in accordance with current disease control policies in England, Wales or Scotland.

9. Animals Showing Nervous or Neurological Signs

If you have a sheep or goat displaying neurological signs, such as behavioural changes, tremors or problems with coordination, you must report this to APHA.

Further information is available at: Scrapie: how to spot and report the disease - GOV.UK [Scrapie: how to spot and report the disease - GOV.UK](#)