



Sheep and Goat Fact Sheet

Occupational Safety and Health Information

General Safety Information for Sheep and Goat Handlers

The following information is intended to inform individuals who are involved with the care and use of animals about potential hazards (e.g., zoonoses, allergies, injuries) associated with working with various animal species and to provide information as to how they may lessen these hazards (e.g., personal hygiene, personal protective equipment [PPE]).

Zoonotic Diseases of Sheep and Goats

Sheep and goats can carry organisms that may cause infection and disease in humans (zoonotic diseases, zoonoses). Exposure to these organisms can come through direct contact with the animal, or indirectly through contact with the animal's feces or body fluids/secretions. In general, sheep and goats that receive routine health care (e.g., vaccinations, deworming) and are closely monitored for disease are less likely a source of disease transmission to humans. People who handle sheep and goats should be aware of a number of important diseases that they may carry, which include: **Rabies, Q-Fever (Coxiella burnetti), Contagious Ecthyma (Orf), Brucellosis, Anthrax**, and gastro-intestinal diseases (e.g. **Salmonellosis, Campylobacteriosis, E. coli 0157:H7, Giardia** and **Cryptosporidia**). Some of these diseases may not produce observable signs of illness in the sheep and goats; therefore, if you handle sheep and goats or their wastes you must take appropriate precautions to prevent transmission of these infections.

Injuries from Handling Sheep or Goats

Handling sheep and goats can be physically demanding. Injuries to people can occur as a result of sheep or goats running into them and/or knocking them over, lacerations, bites, back strain, and knee injuries associated with trying to restrain. Jumping is common in sheep and they can jump with enough force to break a handler's leg, or high enough to strike a handler in the face. Butting is another defensive activity of sheep, and the rule of handling these animals is to never turn your back on the animal while in its pen. Goats are more difficult to handle than sheep or cattle. They do not flow through handling systems easily and when they are frightened they may lie down and pack in a corner, risking injury to other goats in the enclosure. They can also become aggressive towards each other and their defensive mechanisms are to ram or bite, which may also be used against humans. Other hazards in sheep or goat facilities that can injure handlers include: gates, chutes, and other hinged caging causing pinched fingers or bruising; overhanging objects; exposed nails or broken pen wire; electrical shock from hosing pens and walls where light and electrical sockets are not waterproof. Physical injuries such as back strain can occur from handling and restraining sheep and goats due to their size and strength. Individuals with pre-existing back problems may need assistance when catching and handling

sheep or goats. It is essential that people who handle sheep or goats understand proper handling techniques in order to avoid injury to themselves or the animals, such specific handling and restraint techniques, and protective clothing requirements.

Allergic Reactions to Sheep or Goats

Allergic reactions in humans to sheep are rare. Proteins on the hair and skin flakes of goats can cause allergic reactions in some humans. The housing environment of sheep and goats may contain a number of allergens (e.g., grasses, pollens) that can cause allergic reactions in some people. The signs of allergies/allergic reactions may include sneezing, nasal stuffiness/congestion, itchy and watery eyes, and skin rash/itching. Contact dermatitis (itchy skin) can also occur when handling the wool of sheep.

How to Protect Yourself

Wash your Hands: The single most effective preventative measure that can be taken is thorough, regular hand washing. Wash hands and arms after handling sheep or goats. You should avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands or contaminated gloves. Never eat, drink or smoke in animal areas.

Wear Personal Protective Equipment: Coveralls and covered shoes or boots should always be worn when working with sheep or goats. Dust masks should be worn if you have a history of allergies, if you are working in dusty areas, or if you are working with these animals in an indoor location. People who need to wear respiratory protection should be medically cleared before being fit tested with a respirator (if applicable).

Tell your Physician you work with Sheep or Goats: Whenever you are ill, even if you are not certain that the illness is work related, always mention to your physician that you work with sheep or goats. Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms and would not normally be suspected. Your physician needs this information to make an accurate diagnosis. Questions about personal human health should be answered by your physician.

Seek Medical Attention Promptly: If you are injured on the job (e.g., bitten, kicked, stepped on) provide immediate first-aid. Stop the bleeding of wounds and wash the affected areas with soap and water. Where soap and water may not be readily available, use of baby wipes (available in small portable packages) or alcohol-based cleansing gel is acceptable. Alcohol-based gels are neutralized by organic matter so the first application should be wiped off to remove debris, or the area can be cleaned first with a baby wipe, and the next application of gel can be left on the skin.

- Immediately report the incident to your supervisor (if applicable).

- Individuals needing immediate medical treatment for serious injuries should visit the nearest medical treatment facility (e.g., emergency room or urgent care clinic).
- Immediate medical treatment may be required if:
 - An individual's ability to breath properly is affected;
 - Bleeding is excessive and difficult to control;
 - An injury clearly needs sutures; or
 - There is a loss of consciousness associated with the incident.