

Louping ill - Encephalitis

This disease has never been present in Australia, and unless the host tick became established here it is unlikely to be a problem.

Louping ill is a virus disease of sheep and cattle transmitted by ticks. Very rarely other species, including horses, may become infected if bitten by a tick that has previously bitten an infected sheep.

The symptoms are depression, reluctance to move, with the affected animal becoming increasingly uncoordinated and weak when made to walk. Some when examined in the early stages of infection may have a high temperature, though this phase is often transient. The horse will then frequently develop involuntary twitching and tremors of the facial and neck muscles.

This varies in intensity, from quite subtle to very marked. One case has shown a tendency to "chew" with intermittent yawning. They nearly all show varying degrees of depression, decreased or altered appetite, and a change in head and neck carriage.

Because horses are not the natural hosts for this disease it is unlikely that an infected horse could infect another horse or animal.

Ticks are inactive in the winter and only start questing for a host when the mean maximum weekly temperature exceeds 7°C. The incidence of louping-ill follows closely tick activity with losses occurring mostly in spring and autumn.

Control of louping-ill may be achieved either by vaccinating animals or by preventing them becoming infected by control of the tick.

