



## FACTSHEET

# Understanding facial eczema risk – why monitoring matters

“We began with monitoring regional spore counts, then moved to sampling our own paddocks. It’s helped us keep stock out of ‘hot’ paddocks and look after their health, while managing grass at the same time.”

Sheep Poo Study Farmer, Waikato

## Monitoring matters

- **You can’t manage facial eczema (FE) if you don’t measure it.** Check regional spore counts, then follow up with your own on farm testing.
- Warm nights (over 12°C) and humid conditions create perfect conditions for spores.
- Low spore counts still matter – small daily doses add up and can cause liver damage.
- Spore counts matter and are triggers for action.
- Anything over 100,000 spores/gram in pasture is dangerous.
- FE risk stays high until spore counts drop right back to below 20,000 spores/gram in pasture.

## Why monitoring matters

Spore counts help you know when FE risk is rising. They give you early warning but no guarantees – always treat them as a guide, not a safety certificate.

## How to monitor spore counts

### Pasture spore counting

#### *Start with regional counts*

- Local vet clinics publish regular updates from your area.
- Check online through the Awanui Veterinary Lab Portal.
- Sign up for Beef + Lamb New Zealand text alerts. [Click here to join the text alert service.](#)

#### *Then test your own farm*

- Start monitoring your farm when regional counts hit 20,000 spores/gram in pasture.
- Sample 4 representative paddocks of your farm.
- Walk diagonally across the paddock and collect 10 samples to create a 200g pasture sample.
- Paddocks with dead litter or good shelter often run higher.

### Faecal spore counting

This shows what stock are actually eating. It’s useful early in the season or when you want a clearer picture of spore intake.

#### *When to act*

- **20,000 spores/gram in pasture for regional counts** = start on farm monitoring.
- **30,000 spores/gram in pasture on your farm** = talk to your vet to put a plan in place to mitigate risk to livestock.
- **100,000 spores/gram dry matter faecal spore counts** = be vigilant.

## Should I test FE spore counts in pasture or faeces?

Both methods are available and have advantages and disadvantages, these are listed below:

| Pasture spore counting                                                                                                                                                                        | Faecal spore counting                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Advantages</b>                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|  Provides an early warning of potential danger before animals ingest toxic levels                            |  Reflects what animals have actually eaten, giving a direct measure of spore intake |
|  Allows farmers to compare spore levels between paddocks, helping identify safer grazing areas               |  Useful for early-season monitoring when overall spore levels are low               |
|  Useful when spore counts are rising quickly, as it shows immediate pasture risk                             |                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Disadvantages</b>                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|  Results are affected by grazing pressure and pasture height – heavily grazed areas often show higher counts |  Cannot test paddocks that are not being grazed                                     |
|  May not reflect the actual spore intake by animals under certain grazing conditions                         |  Results are strongly influenced by grazing pressure                                |

### Keep checking

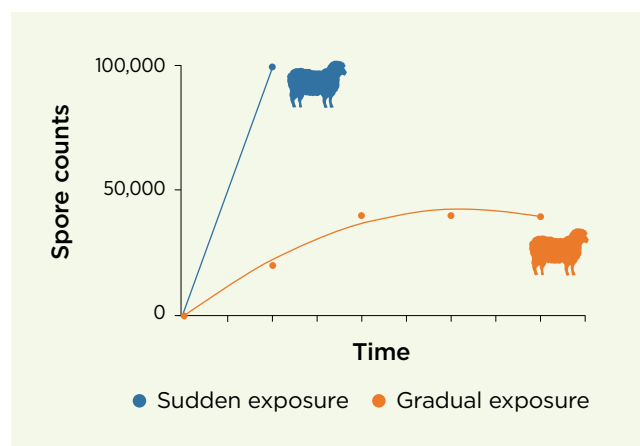
Test every week through the high risk season (Jan-May). Keep monitoring before stopping zinc or other prevention methods to make sure it is safe to do so.

### Grazing and spore risk

- Most spores sit low in the sward, especially where there's dead matter.
- Avoid grazing down to the base.
- During danger periods, use short grazing periods (1-2 days in paddock or break before shifting), especially for young stock.

### Small doses add up

Animals can get FE by eating low spore numbers over many days. Consistent smaller daily doses can cause just as much damage as one big one.



### The accumulating toxic effect

Toxin (Sporidesmin) intake = Spore count **X** amount pasture eaten **X** number of days of spore intake.

### Weather warnings

- Warm, humid conditions are a red flag.
- **Watch out for dew after a dry spell** - The fungus only needs a small amount of moisture for spore numbers to explode.

### Resources

This resource is part of the [Farmer Facial Eczema Toolkit](#) on the B+L NZ Knowledge Hub. Head there to find out more.

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