



## Managing lice in your herd

Alpaca CheQA

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Infestation of alpacas with the chewing louse, *Bovicola breviceps*, is widespread in Australia, albeit at low levels, and its presence is usually detected in herds at shearing time. Lice are species specific, meaning that camelid lice only infect camelids, cattle lice only infect cattle and sheep lice only infect sheep.

Adult lice are 1-1.5 mm long, white or light tan. Alpacas should be examined for lice in good light, preferably outdoors in sunlight. The base of the hair fibres in several of the favoured sites (base of the tail, along the sides of the thorax and abdomen, on the upper part of the limbs, and in the flank) should be carefully observed for lice or attached eggs. Lice tend to move away from the light as the fleece is opened so it is necessary to make numerous partings in the favoured sites.

The major source of transmission of lice from animal to animal is where close body contact occurs. E.g. mating, lactating hembra with cria at foot, communal transport, shows or shared stables. In addition, the chance of transfer of lice via inanimate objects such as common grooming utensils, shearing gear, blankets or harnesses which are in constant use may be quite high and owners and shearers should be aware of this and disinfect them accordingly. In the case of housing, bedding or pasture, a 14-day period based on the incubation of the egg, or 7 days if only adult or nymphal lice are considered, would be sufficient to ensure absolute protection in the absence of any additional control by chemical or physical means.

*Bovicola breviceps* is a biting or chewing louse and is not affected by injectable parasiticides, so topical treatment must be applied to remove lice infestations. Alpaca farmers must remember that no chemicals are registered for use in alpacas and as such any use is off-label and should be performed with caution. Withholding periods shown for sheep and cattle may not be the appropriate withholding period for camelids as testing of residues in camelid wool and meat has not been performed by pharmaceutical companies that make these products.

Use of **spinosad** (Extinosad Lice and Fly Eliminator®) in a plunge or shower dip, with two applications 2-3 weeks apart, has been shown to eradicate lice from an alpaca herd. Alpaca farmers must ensure that the alpacas are thoroughly wetted to the skin all over so the active ingredient reaches the lice; this is achieved by *adding a wetting agent (such as alcohol alkoxylate) to the dipping solution*. Dilute spinosad in water according to the on-label recommended rate for sheep.