

ORF Virus Disease

Community and Public Health

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ORF virus is a skin disease caused by a virus of the Poxviridae family.

What are the symptoms?

A small raised spot will appear around 3 to 6 days after contact with the virus. This spot will grow larger and become surrounded by a pale ring which will turn red. It will feel like a sore and can be as large as a 10 cent piece. A few small watery drops may emerge if this spot breaks.

The red spot will become weepy and develop a crust, before it dries and forms a scab, under which the skin starts to heal.

The sore is more irritating than painful and may feel prickly. It may interfere with your work if it is on the palm of your hand, on a finger or near a joint. Sometimes you can get pain in your armpit.

Complications are rare, but sometimes a rash can occur all over the body.

Symptoms may last for 3 to 6 weeks.

How is it caught or spread?

By coming into contact with animals which are infected by the virus. The virus enters the body through a break in the skin such as a cut, scratch, blister or burn. Person to person spread is rare.

The virus is spread by direct contact in the mucous membranes of infected animals. The virus is very resistant and therefore may persist in the environment and on animal skin and hair. It can also be caught through contamination of knives, shears, stalls, trucks and clothing.

Who is at risk?

This illness is most commonly seen in people who come into contact with infected sheep in New Zealand, and is more common in farm workers and freezing workers.

The virus is also seen in goats and deer.

How is it treated?

The infection is viral and so antibiotics will not work. Keeping the sore dry will speed healing and help prevent secondary bacterial infections.

- See your doctor or nurse if you have a sore;
- Dress the sore with a waterproof dressing;
- Change the dressing often, to keep it dry and clean;
- Don't try to open the sore or probe it with a needle; and
- Don't rub the sore on or near your face.

How is spread prevented?

You can prevent the spread of ORF virus disease by:

- covering cuts or other wounds, with a waterproof dressing until the wound has healed.
- having good personal hygiene. After handling animals, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. This helps remove any virus you may have picked up.
- washing clothes that have been worn on the farm or while working with animals; and
- ensuring general cleanliness of animal housing areas.



For further information, contact:

- Your local doctor or practice nurse;
- Your local Public Health Nurse; or
- A Health Protection Officer at Community and Public Health.

Other resources available on animal borne infections:

- Animal Petting Zoo Visits
- Campylobacter, E. coli and Salmonella
- Cryptosporidium and Giardia
- Yersiniosis

Image sourced from Yahoo NZ website.

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