

# New rules loom on reporting suspected cases of sheep scab

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Tighter controls on one of the most persistent sheep health problems come into operation this month making farmers legally obliged to notify authorities if they suspect sheep scab in their flocks.

The controls, introduced on 17 December, will also impose movement restrictions until the sheep are either treated, slaughtered or a veterinary surgeon provides a negative diagnosis.

The changes also mean that owners or keepers who fail to take action on sheep scab - the most contagious parasitic disease of sheep - face movement restrictions being imposed on their flock until the issue has been dealt with. They will also be liable for prosecution.

Chief veterinary officer for Scotland Simon Hall said that while there were effective treatments available for sheep scab there was also a need for realism and accept that eradication from the country was not yet feasible.

"The majority of sheep keepers are already taking steps to keep sheep scab out of their flocks and to deal with problems when they occur," he said. "The new sheep scab order is intended to support their efforts by reducing the spread of scab from infected flocks.

"I would encourage all sheep keepers to source sheep responsibly and to take prompt action and let their local divisional veterinary manager know if they suspect scab in their flock."

NFU Scotland vice-president Nigel Miller said the clear message was that keeping silent on the disease that "plagues our sheep sector" was no longer acceptable. "To make it work we farmers have to be prepared to report problems in our own flocks, or risk spreading the disease to other sheep."