



Orf Virus (Sore Mouth Infection)

1.0 Introduction

Orf virus is a member of the *Parapoxvirus* genus in the Poxvirus family. This virus primarily causes an infection in sheep and goats, although it can be transmitted to people. Orf virus infection in animals is commonly referred to as sore mouth, scabby mouth or contagious ecthyma. The animals which are infected with the orf virus will usually develop scabby sores (lesions around their lips, muzzle and in their mouth.)

2.0 People at Risk

People at risk are those working with sheep, goats and other small ruminants. Individuals are advised to wear gloves when handling small ruminants as well as frequent handwashing during and after contact. Persons whose immune systems are compromised or suppressed due to infection with HIV, Lupus, cancer therapy, etc, can develop serious symptoms following orf virus infection including large tumor-like lesions, progressive disease, development of multiple lesions, or erythema multiforme reactions involving rashes on the mucous membranes and skin.

3.0 Transmission

Orf virus infections in humans typically occur when broken skin comes into contact with the virus from infected animals or contaminated equipment. Activities that may put you at risk for infection include:

1. Bottle feeding, tube feeding or shearing sheep or goats
2. Petting or having casual contact with infected animals
3. Handling infected equipment such as a harness etc...
4. Being bitten by an animal with orf virus

Orf virus is not transmitted from one infected person to another. A person can be infected multiple times throughout his or her life, but subsequent infections may be less pronounced and may heal more quickly

4.0 Symptoms

Infection with orf virus is usually confined to the epidermis (top layer) of the skin. Lesions (one to a few) or nodules will often occur on the fingers, hands or the forearms. Lesions begin as small papules that will become ulcerative in nature. Orf virus lesions typically progress through six stages each lasting approximately one week. Other symptoms may include a mild fever, malaise (fatigue), or local swelling of lymph nodes. Lesions generally range in size from 2-3 cm but can be as large as 5 cm. They can be painful but usually resolve on their own without scarring

5.0 Diagnosis, and Prevention

Orf is diagnosed in people by a laboratory test available at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Specimens must be submitted for testing through a doctor or health department. Orf virus is best prevented by wearing gloves while working with small ruminants, frequent handwashing and thorough cleaning of equipment which is used. Non-intact skin should be covered with a bandage prior to donning gloves.

7.0 Resources

[CDC Orf Virus Link:](#)

Images of Infected Animals



For further information related to possible zoonotic disease exposure, or further related resources, please contact UT Occupational Health Nurse Bryan Cranmore RN, COHN at bcranmore@utk.edu, or for urgent response the OHP nurse can be reached at 865-755-8924

Reviewed and Approved 6/18/2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bryan Cranmore RN".

Bryan Cranmore RN, COHN
Occupational Health Nurse

