

# Facts about Orf

Orf is a contagious viral skin disease acquired from infected sheep and goats (scabby mouth disease).

It is also called contagious pustular dermatitis, ecthyma contagiosum or pustular ecthyma.

## Transmission

Sheep shearers, abattoir workers, farm workers and animal handlers are at increased risk of orf. It is usually transmitted to humans through accidental inoculation of cuts, bites or abrasions on the hands, arms or face while handling infected animals. Person-to-person transmission is rare. The disease is self-limiting and infection results in immunity against further orf lesions.

## Incubation period

Three days to several weeks.

## Signs and symptoms

The first sign of orf is a firm, red or reddish-blue vesicle (blister) on the hands, arms or, rarely, on the face. The vesicle is usually solitary and up to 3cm in diameter, but occasionally there are several. The vesicle may be itchy or painful and progress to a red, weeping nodule that eventually crusts and heals in weeks to months. The vesicle may also become infected by bacteria. No specific treatment is necessary in most cases. The lesion should be covered to prevent further transmission, and bacterial infection should be treated. Large lesions can be surgically removed. There have been no reports of fatality following orf infection.



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## Prevention

Orf can be prevented by:

- sanitising of animal housing to prevent or minimise scabby mouth in animals,
- avoiding contact with animals with skin lesions,
- adhering to workplace policies about the use of personal protective equipment such as gloves, aprons, gowns, and rubber boots,
- washing exposed skin with soap and water, especially after cuts, bites or abrasions are sustained,
- covering any wounds, abrasions and suspicious lesions with a waterproof dressing to prevent further infections.

## Further information

Contact your GP.

For specific occupational risk control guidelines contact the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection.

Produced by the Department of Health Communicable Disease Control Directorate, with the assistance of the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection.

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