Abscesses in the vertebral column are usually associated with systemic infection with bacterial embolism or local infection spread due to inadequate umbilical disinfection, castration, tail docking and ear tagging. This communication reports the findings in two lambs with abscesses in the cervical and lumbar vertebral bodies. On November 2008, two female, 2 months old, Corriedale lambs, arrived at the Institute of Animal Pathology of Universidad Austral de Chile. The lambs were originally, from a herd near Osorno, Región de Los Lagos, Chile. Animals underwent ear tagging and deworming previously. During neurological examination one animal showed flaccid paralysis of the hind limbs and the other lamb showed tetraplejia and lack of proprioception, spinal reflexes and superficial pain sensation in all four limbs. The lambs were euthanized, necropsied and samples for microbiological analysis were obtained. After macroscopic analysis, both animals had a semicircular section on the dorsal border of the left ear. The ears were thickened with moderate hemorrhage and scar reaction. One of the lambs had a right ventral enlargement between L5 and S1, due to a large abscess with deformity and deviation of L5 vertebral body. Purulent content into the vertebral canal was present around the meninges and cauda equina. In addition, large internal iliac lymph nodes were observed. The other lamb showed marked ventral enlargement between C2 and C3. Two large abscesses were present in the vertebral body and caudal articular processes of C2 causing vertebral canal stenosis and marked spinal cord compression. Also, enlargement of medial retropharyngeal lymph nodes were observed. Bacterial culture of spinal exudate and lymph nodes was positive to Escherichia coli. Pathological findings indicated that abscesses at the cervical and lumbar vertebral bodies were the cause of paraplejia and tetraplejia in two lambs.

Isolation of Escherichia coli from the abscesses is likely due to contamination of ear tagging by using contaminated instruments. Bacterial embolic dissemination from the ear infection by retrograde venous invasion to the vertebral venous plexus is probably the mechanism of spread.