

# Be vigilant to ensure lambs receive enough colostrum

By FW Reporters

Post-morteming of lambs has shown vigilance is crucial in the first few hours of lambing to ensure lambs are receiving enough colostrum.

Just because a lamb is seen suckling does not necessarily mean they have received enough colostrum, said vet Matthew Pugh, of Belmont Veterinary Centre in Hereford.

Mr Pugh has reported a number of cases where lambs have died within the first two to three days of life because of insufficient intakes. "In fact, post-mortems have proved a novel and effective tool for demonstrating to farmers the importance of colostrum to the newborn lamb," said Mr Pugh.

"I spent an afternoon last week with a group of farmers post-morteming lambs that had been born dead or had died in the first two to three days of life, as part of a improving lamb survival rates meeting we ran with EBLEX.

"One group of lambs we had available were good, strong lambs that had been found dead or dying in their pens within two days of birth.

"Virtually all of them died as a result of a similar problem – when opened up, there was little to no milk within their abomasums or bowels and there was also evidence of septicaemia."

Mr Pugh said this highlighted how diligent shepherds needed to



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Ensuring lambs receive enough colostrum in the first few hours is vital.

be, as all these lambs had reportedly been seen to have suckled.

Iain Richards, of the Westmorland Veterinary Group in Kendal, has used a similar method to demonstrate the importance of colostrum as part of a Farnskills Lambing course.

"We have some dead lambs to use as teaching aids. At the end of the course, I always open these lambs up to see why they died and in most of them there was no milk in their stomachs."

Mr Richards said demonstrating the empty lambs was an excellent way to emphasise to the farmers the importance of good feeding.

He advocated having groups of lambs examined in this way during lambing. "The post-mortem may be brief, but a lot of information is gained in a short space of time and it can help save further losses," he explained.

The importance of that first suck of milk, laden with antibodies

and energy, is thoroughly understood by everyone involved in lambing. But is it so well-known that, in the great rush of work at lambing time, it is often overlooked, said Mr Richards.

"Have we also become complacent so that if the lamb is seen to suck after birth, we move on to the next lamb, little realising that the suck didn't fill the stomach?"

To ensure lambs are well fed, Mr Pugh recommended double dipping lambs (using 10% alcoholic iodine) – once at birth and again three to four hours later.

"Not only will this reduce your risk of navel infections and joint ill, but it identifies hollow lambs that need stomach tubing with more colostrum, hopefully minimising lamb losses."

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## KEY FACTS

- \* Lambs need 50ml/kg birth weight of colostrum in the first six hours
- \* They need 100ml/kg in the first 24 hours
- \* Infection only accounts for one-third of lamb losses (and many of them are prevented by good colostrum)
- \* Ewe feed plays a significant role in colostrum production and quality. Ensure you are feeding your ewes well enough in late pregnancy to improve lamb survival

Read more about preventing lamb losses at [www.fwi.co.uk/lambingspecial](http://www.fwi.co.uk/lambingspecial)