

LIVESTOCK VET'S VIEW

Whatever the market conditions for sheep, the returns will always be greater if the flock is fit and healthy. Louise Hartley asks Northumberland-based vet John Macfarlane for advice on making sure vaccinations are stored properly and administered correctly.

Ensure vaccines are used to best effect

Vaccines are one of the most important tools in maintaining a healthy and profitable flock and there are currently about 15 licensed vaccines in the UK for use in sheep.

Vaccines stimulate the body's immune system to recognise, fight and remember a disease in case of future exposure. Some offer protection which will last for the productive life of the sheep, while others need more frequent, often annual, revaccination.

Northumberland-based vet, John Macfarlane, chairman of XL Vets, says: "The chain of supply from manufacture to point of sale is highly regulated and subject to frequent inspection. At Alnthumbria vets, we check and record all fridge temperatures daily and deliveries are received from refrigerated transport.

"Therefore, to ensure the vaccine will work properly on-farm,



the same level of care should be taken between the point of sale and the animal – and often this does not happen."

Storage

Mr Macfarlane says it is important to make sure the vaccines are correctly stored until used; typically, at 2-8degC, normally away from light and avoiding freezing. If vaccines are supplied by post or carrier, make sure these conditions have also been maintained throughout transport.

Perhaps the most important part of any vaccine is the package insert, says Mr Macfarlane.



John Macfarlane

"The package insert provides the facts on how to use vaccine properly, including diseases or organisms prevented, dosage, route of administration, interval between doses and revaccination interval.

"It also details storage conditions, shelf life after opening the bottle, suitability for use in breeding or young sheep and concurrent use with other medicines.

"There is important guidance on how to dispose of unused vaccine and empty containers and warnings in the event of accidental self-injection for the operator and for doctors.

"The consequences of accidental self-injection with some vaccines can be extremely serious so they should be administered very carefully."

Always make sure you are familiar with the content of the



Vaccines should be stored correctly until used, typically refrigerated between 2-8degC.

package insert before you store, use or dispose of the vaccine or its container, advises Mr Macfarlane.

Passive transfer

Sheep have a particularly efficient system of protecting their newborn lambs from infection for the first few weeks of life, known as passive transfer.

Vaccinating against pasteurellosis/ manheimia and clostridial diseases, a few weeks before lambing will stimulate enhanced antibody protection by the ewe which is then concentrated in the colostrum.

"Antibodies from colostrum ingested in the first six hours provide protection for the first few weeks of life. Good quality colostrum is, for the lamb, the most valuable and economic medicine you will ever give to them," says Mr Macfarlane.

"Animals which are ill or injured will respond poorly to any vaccine, so vaccination should be

delayed until they are well again."

For programmes which require double primary course vaccination or regular boosters, the failure of any dose is likely to leave the sheep susceptible for the remainder of its life.

Mr Macfarlane says: "If one booster is not done properly, subsequent boosters are unlikely to reinstate full protection.

"Therefore, it is crucial all

vaccinations are done correctly with a vaccine which has been properly stored and prepared and with clean equipment which delivers the correct dose."

A Special Import Certificate or a Special Treatment Certificate may be granted allowing vaccines available overseas to be imported for use in the UK, such as for control of campylobacter abortion.



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JOHN MACFARLANE

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Top tips for vaccinating sheep

■ **Equipment:** The tool used to administer vaccines largely depends on the number of animals to be vaccinated and the route of administration.

A vaccination gun is recommended. It allows proper cleaning of the needle between each sheep, eliminating the risk of contaminating the remaining vaccine.

■ **Needles:** Subcutaneous vaccines need a 20 gauge, 0.9mm by 15mm (0.6 inch), needle. A 20 gauge, 0.9mm by 25mm (1in) needle is used for intramuscular vaccines.

■ **Site of injection:** The package insert will indicate the site of injection and for subcutaneous vaccination this is generally on the side of the neck 10cm (4in) back from the ear. For intramuscular vaccination, the neck muscle in front of the shoulder is usually suggested.

■ **Replacements:** Needles should be replaced after every 15-20 injections. If using single-

use syringes, it is critical the needle used for injecting the sheep is not reintroduced into the vaccine vial. Instead, leave a sterile needle inserted into the bottle and withdraw further doses through this.

■ **Preparation:** The package insert will provide instruction on preparing the vaccine prior to use. Some must be shaken, some should be warmed and some need to be reconstituted with a provided solvent.

■ **Administering:** On no account should different vaccines be mixed together in the same syringe although some may be given while the sheep is already on another vaccine programme.

Some vaccines are rendered ineffective while others can even cause harm if they are given concurrently or within a certain time frame of antibiotics or other medicines.

This may be stated on the packaging but if you have any doubt, refer to your supplier.

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