

Vaccinating lambs – nurture and growth



Many of your customers will be well through, or finished, lambing by now. Thoughts will turn to nurturing and growing the new lambs as efficiently and quickly as possible, says **Richard Knight**, Director at the Westmorland Veterinary Group



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Among the several causes of sudden death in lambs is clostridial disease.

Causes of sudden death should be investigated, usually as soon as the farmer flags it up, since his or her tolerance has usually run out by this stage. Most of these post-mortems are best done by vets specialising in small ruminants, or through the local Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) veterinary centre. Good post-mortem data is a cornerstone of disease surveillance and provides some of the most valuable information generated for a farmer.

Over recent years we have come across many farmers that don't vaccinate for clostridial disease. There are also many who have adopted a vaccination protocol which is far removed from the



datasheet. Most alternative practices are ineffective, such as a single shot and no more.

Pulpy kidney disease and braxy are two of the main conditions we see. Pulpy kidney can occur even in large, well grown lambs (even in purchased breeding tup-lambs later in the year). Braxy typically occurs after eating frosty grass.

Vaccination against *Pasteurella pneumonia* is also

something that all too often is contemplated only after a number of deaths have occurred. Single strain vaccines such as Ovipast are actually quite good in my experience. These may be needed especially if the weather forecasts are not very good, as is the case this year. A sudden dip in temperature, along with an increase in wind and rain, greatly increase the lambs' needs for

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energy for maintenance. Difficult weather often reduces or stops growth and has the knock-on effect that the energy-hungry immune system can be depressed for a short but significant time. If the immune system is already primed with a suitable vaccine, then losses can be substantially mitigated.

Overriding all of this, as always, is good nutrition. In order to respond well to vaccination, sheep must be healthy and well-nourished. If death rates are high, or lamb growth rates are low due to poor milk production in the ewe, then the whole flock response to vaccination may be dulled and losses may still occur. Keep talking to your customers, making sure that you get all the facts so that the best outcome can be achieved.

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