

Keep it clean to ensure sheep and lambs stay healthy

Never lose sight of the importance of good hygiene and equipment checks. That way, you'll avoid many expensive problems, says sheep vet **Richard Knight**



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As I write this, I'm in the thick of the lambing season, with every night on-call leading to some stuck lambs. There have certainly been many lambings and Caesareans this year and I've had my first case in 20 years of conjoined twins! The mother is doing fine.

In among all these emergencies there seems to have been a steady flow of lambs with joint-ill. This bacteria-caused disease has a few different predisposing factors, with a common factor of hygiene in the lambing pens.

As everyone knows, good hygiene means clean, dry, well-bedded pens rather than just attempting to tackle problems

with another antibiotic prescription. In tandem with that, though, comes good hand and equipment hygiene.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness, so make sure things are up to scratch.

AUDIT AND CHECK

As vets, we often need to audit equipment cleanliness and make wear-and-tear checks to ensure that things are up-to-scratch.

Ready access to boxes of plastic arm-length gloves, nitrile gloves (rather than questioning everyone as to whether they have a latex allergy) and clean bottles of lubricant, without the crusty gummed-up end which could harbour bacteria, are a must when dealing with lambing ewes. The nitrile gloves are

also easier to wash clean and then disinfect than our hands.

This also applies when dealing with newborn lambs. How many times is it that a dirty great finger gets put in a new-dropped lamb's mouth to clear it, rather than a clean (gloved) one, or a dirty stomach tube is used to administer life-giving colostrum?

These lambs are at an increased risk of going down with watery mouth or joint-ill a few days later.

Needles must be kept clean and changed frequently.

BACTERIA RISK

We are coming up to a time of year where sheep and lambs will get injected with vaccines and wormers, and also some will be treated with injectables for sheep scab. Care needs to

be taken, too, that the needles used are kept clean and changed frequently. Although a sheep fleece may be dry, it is still laden with bacteria, which will be deposited on an unguarded needle pushed through it.

IMMUNE RESPONSE

A sheep may become ill, feverish with no other symptoms, form an abscess, or at worse die from an infection if a dirty needle is used. After a vaccine is used, a good immune response to it is required, rather than fighting an introduced infection.

Sterimatic needle guards can be used for subcutaneous (clear guard, 12mm needle penetration) or intra-muscular (green guard, 22mm needle penetration) injections and are

suitable for use with all products, bar live vaccines (eg enzootic abortion of the ewe and toxoplasmosis vaccines).

These are great topics to discuss at point of sale, as it's something that is overlooked by many.

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