

# Health and hygiene when lambing

**Preparation for lambing starts well before the lambing shed, says sheep veterinary consultant Paul Roger. He recommends making a lambing health plan with a vet not long after the tups go in, and making sure ewe nutrition is right to ensure good colostrum supply.**

Paul also highlights the importance of vaccinating ewes for clostridial diseases in the run-up to lambing, to further enhance colostrum.

Mark Pass, an SQP advisor at Beeston Animal Health in Cheshire, adds mineral supplementation to the topic of nutrition, saying to talk to your local merchant about different options for drenches, licks and boluses.

"Your local SQP will have useful knowledge about deficiencies in your region, but nothing beats getting bloods done, so work with your vet and then involve us to look at the next steps," he says.

Paul says to prepare your lambing shed well in advance, aiming for a clean environment rather than a sterile one and allowing ewes to get accustomed to it before lambing down. Mark recommends taking an inventory of what equipment you have, stocking up on supplies, and finding



*Lambing pens should have at least a foot of clean straw.*

a suitable tool box or similar to keep everything together in the same place. His shopping list includes iodine, rubber rings, arm length gloves, lubricant, plenty of disinfectant, stomach tubes, twin lamb drench and calcium, among other things.

"It might be stating the obvious, but it's all about pre planning," he says. "Also remember lambing aids, because having those to hand can sometimes save having to call a vet. Chat to your vet about whether you should also have antibiotics to hand and what to use.

"The most important thing is artificial colostrum," Mark adds. "While there is nothing better than the mother's own milk, if you need a substitute you need it there and then and not have to wait until the shop opens on Monday morning."

Mark and Paul both say using lambing gloves for assisted lambings will reduce antibiotic use. Mark says: "It's about what's on your hands when you put them inside the ewe. I know at 12 o'clock at night you don't want to put a glove on, but if you have a ready stock to hand you are more likely to use them."

Paul says a routine intervention using

gloves and plenty of lubrication will not require antibiotics. "Use antibiotics where they are needed, but do not use them for blanket coverage to cover up defects on your hygiene," he says.

## Bedding

Paul recommends 'at least a foot of fresh straw' in lambing pens and a thorough clean-down between occupants, using a powder disinfectant if there is not time for anything else. He also says to think about what to use for feed and water buckets, so lambs do not drown or break a leg.

Once turned outside, Paul says to always provide shelter. If none is available naturally then a cross of big bales will work well. If bad weather makes turnout difficult, he says any hard standing is better than overcrowding indoors – but again provide big bales for shelter and regularly supply dry bedding for stock to lie on.

## Alternative bedding

Finding that absorbent wood shavings keep lambing pens drier than straw, Andrew Phillips from Lamphey, Pembrokeshire, is a convert to this bedding, despite it being more commonly used in horse stables.

He lambs 1,700 ewes indoors and goes through 200 bags of Bedmax shavings, saying it keeps pens more hygienic and significantly reduces lamb mortality by cutting watery mouth and scour; antibiotic use has also fallen. Andrew says shavings are comfy for ewes to lie on, less labour intensive, dust-free, easier to throw into pens, and particularly good on concrete floors where moisture doesn't run away easily. By choosing a pine shaving there are also associated antiseptic benefits against bacteria such as *e.coli*.

## Farm assurance reminder

Under the updated Red Tractor farm assurance standards in England, scheme members must introduce new staff to a farm and explain their tasks to them. This includes extra labour at lambing time. Although this induction does not need to be documented for farm assurance reasons, writing a quick check list of how the lambing shed works is not a bad idea for all units (including non-assured farms) as it makes everything clear, and might even help yourself before lambs start arriving.