

Prepare for lambing pitfalls to reduce number of losses

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1: Lambing equipment

- Clean, arm length gloves
- Clean, waterproof clothing
- Lubricant
- Disinfected lambing ropes and snare
- Clean buckets with warm water and disinfectant
- Halter for ewe restraint
- Resuscitation drops
- Medicines – injectable antibiotic, oxytocin, painkiller, blue spray

vet for backup can be important. Generally speaking, if you attempt to aid the ewe but are not getting any progress after five minutes then you should call for help. Vets can give an epidural or medication to give more space and allow more chance of a successful lambing with no damage to the ewe or lamb. In some cases a caesarean section may be required.

Other clear reasons to call the vet include: feeling a tight ring at the cervix so you can't feel the lamb (ringwomb); finding a lamb that is too big and you are unable to get a hand over the back of the shoulders; and when the ewe is torn or injured during lambing and requires attention.

After an assisted lambing it is common practice to give the ewe a dose of injectable antibiotic. This will help prevent her developing an infection within her uterus. Something less commonly thought of is to provide pain relief and anti-inflammatory medication. Using a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) is important in these situations. The ewe will be bruised and in pain. Reducing this pain and inflammation as soon as possible will mean she mothers the lamb and gets back to her food quicker to produce quality milk.

2: Tips to remember for assisted lambings

- Repel the lamb sufficiently before attempting any corrections.
- Use plenty of lubrication.
- Know which limbs are which – fore limbs bend the same way at both joints, hind limbs bend in opposite directions.
- Always return to the ewe once the lamb(s) is delivered to check for tears and other injuries and also for any further lambs left inside.
- If you are struggling for space to reposition the lamb, try repositioning the ewe. Having her laid down on the other side or even stood up can often free up that bit of extra space.
- Don't cut the umbilical cord, gently pull it away until it breaks so that bleeding is minimised.

A newborn lamb should shake its head within two minutes of birth, begin standing within five minutes and have sucked within 40 minutes. The most important thing for the newborn lamb is to ensure that sufficient colostrum is taken within the first three hours of life. Colostrum is essential to healthy lamb development, as it transfers essential nutrients as well as maternal antibody to protect against diseases. This is where clostridial vaccination of the ewe is passed down to the lamb.

Colostrum

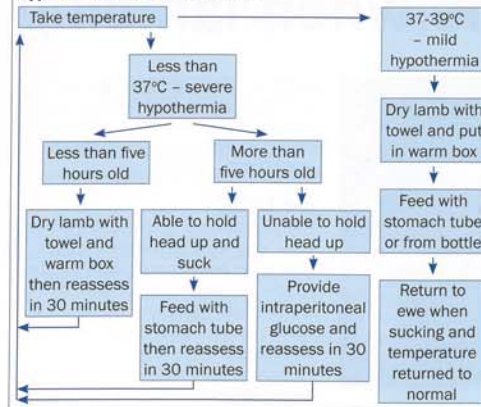
If the lamb has not sucked within three hours, the ewe should be milked and this provided to the lamb by bottle or stomach tube. A lamb should take 50ml/kg of colostrum in this time period.

Lambs should have their navels

3: Key biosecurity points to be aware of

- Have a separate area for sick ewes and lambs to be cared for.
- Wear gloves and use antibiotic hand wash between assisted lambings.
- Keep bedding dry and fresh when lambing indoors.
- Use a disinfectant powder when wet/dirty areas have been cleaned out.
- Remove all bedding and disinfect individual pens after each use.
- Remove placentas and prevent access by dogs or wildlife.
- Insist visitors wear clean waterproof clothing and gloves around the stock.

Hypothermic lamb decision tree



Nearly half of lamb losses occur within the first 48 hours of life, so prepare now to avoid common pitfalls.

Lambing is inevitably a busy time, but slight changes can make a big difference to lamb survival and the profitability of the business.

Nearly 50% of lamb losses occur either at lambing or in the 48 hours following, so being well prepared and aware of the potential pitfalls is key to preventing avoidable losses and ensuring good early growth rates.

Prior to your expected start date make sure you get all your facilities ready. Check water and feed provision is suitable with outside pipes lagged to prevent freezing. Indoor facilities should be clean, dry, well ventilated and all hurdles and adopters disinfected. Stock up on equipment well in advance – see panel 1.

Interventions

During lambing it is important to know when and how to help a ewe lamb. There are some situations when a ewe should be restrained and you should investigate, such as when the head appears on its own without the front feet, or when there is only one leg or a tail.

Also intervene if no clear progress has been made 30 minutes after the water bag emerged, or if the time for lambing has been more than 90 minutes, or if the ewe is in clear distress. Regardless of why you have to interfere with a lambing, there are some important common points to remember – see panel 2.

Sometimes everyone needs a bit of extra assistance. Knowing when to call the



Lambs should shake their heads within two minutes of birth, stand within five minutes and suck within 40 minutes.

dressed with iodine soon after birth. Ensure that all of the cord and surrounding area are covered. Where possible check it has dried up sufficiently 24 hours later and retreat if needed.

Hypothermia is a common cause of loss in the newborn lamb and can be due to starvation, exposure or a combination of both. To assess for hypothermia use a thermometer at around 3cm into the rectum.

- More than 40°C – fever, too hot
- 39-40°C – normal temperature
- 37-39°C – mild hypothermia
- Less than 37°C – severe hypothermia

What to do if the lamb is hypothermic can be decided by following the decision tree – see diagram. When you need to give intraperitoneal glucose to a cold lamb that is still unable to hold its head up five hours after birth, it is important to do this before putting the lamb in the warm box. A sterile 50ml syringe, one-inch 19g needle and warm (but not hot) 20% glucose

is required. If you have a 40% glucose product dilute it with an equal amount of water. Hold the lamb with front legs raised then inject half an inch to one side and one inch below the navel with the needle directed downwards towards the rump. Large lambs should receive 50ml and small lambs 25ml.

Disease

Biosecurity at lambing time is important in minimising disease transmission and maintaining a healthy flock. It is also important to protect yourself, as diseases such as salmonella, orf and enzootic abortion are all transmissible to humans.

The wet, dirty and warm floor of a poorly kept lambing shed is a perfect breeding environment for pathogens that cause disease. Watery mouth can lead to death and is the result of excessive e.coli multiplication within the gut, while navel ill is the infection of a wet navel that can lead to joint ill.

In order to reduce the disease incidence it is important to reduce the pathogen build up through the key points listed – see panel 3.

An additional point to consider is removing older lambs from the lambing shed, as these will be acting as 'pathogen multipliers' in that they will be unaffected by a bacteria but will be shedding it out in large numbers. This means younger animals in the same environment with less immunity (i.e. newborns) will have to deal with a much greater degree of environment infection. Removing the older animals or preferably moving the ewes still to lamb to a clean, unused pen will greatly reduce this 'pathogen multiplier' effect.

For more information on infectious causes of abortion see page 36. Find out more on the general topic in the Eblex 'Reducing Lamb Losses for Better Returns' handbook – see www.eblex.org.uk/returns or call 08702 418829.

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