

Tips for Successful Lambing

With the days slowly starting to lengthen out, it is a sure sign that lambing is upon us with many farms already well into the swing of it. This is a crucial time of year as unfortunately it is when the most lamb and ewe deaths occur. Many of these deaths can be avoided by remembering basic husbandry around the birthing period.

Environment Indoor lambing is great to ensure a warm, safe environment and easier monitoring, but it also means that ewes are much more tightly housed. This causes the beds to get wet and dirtier much quicker allowing bacteria to be harboured within the bedding. The pen should be freshly-bedded, particularly around feeding areas and water troughs as these can become sodden. A useful tip is to apply lime to these areas before bedding down each time to reduce the bacterial load. A good rule of thumb is that you should be able to kneel down in the bedding for 30 seconds without getting wet knees!! There are several powder disinfectants that can be used as well to reduce contamination.

When to Intervene Intervention with lambing should only be considered when the health of the ewe or the unborn lamb is at risk. As a rough guideline, lambing should be assisted when a) there has been more than an hour since the water bag appeared; b) no further progress 20 minutes after parts of the foetus have been visible at the vulva; c) 30 minutes have passed since the birth of the first lamb when twins or triplets are expected or if there is an abnormal discharge or a prolapse.

Lambing Technique Hopefully you shouldn't need to assist at too many lambings, but if you do here are a few tips:

- Wash your hands before you start (and once you've finished!!) and/or wear gloves.
- Use plenty of lubricating gel.
- Take your time to establish what is being presented – is the cervix open fully? are the legs front or back? Do the legs belong to the same lamb? Pulling aimlessly can cause the lamb to become distressed and/or cause injury to the ewe.
- Learn how to apply head/leg ropes or a snare – they make manipulating the lamb much easier!!
- Know when you're not winning – if you've been trying to get the lamb for 15 mins and not succeeding it's time to call for assistance. In our experience it is more profitable to bring a ewe to the vets when there is a chance of live lambs, as what you may be finding difficult someone else may be able to correct more easily.
- Pull lambs through steadily and try not to break the umbilical cord until the lamb is breathing normally. Naturally ewes would lamb lying down and once the lamb is born she would lie there quietly for a few moments with the cord attached to supply the lamb with oxygen before she gets up to lick it.
- Immediately treat all new-born lambs' navel with a 10% iodine solution or our new Super 7+ navel spray
- If a ewe has had a difficult lambing it is a good idea to give her some pain relief to reduce swelling and some antibiotics to avoid infection.

Lamb Care As lambs do not get any antibodies across the placenta from the ewe they are effectively born with no immune system, therefore it is essential that they get sufficient colostrum. Lambs should receive approximately 50ml/kg of good quality colostrum within the first 2 hours of life. Ideally this should be done by suckling the ewe but if this is not possible then the ewe should be milked out and the lamb fed by bottle or stomach tube (your vet will be happy to demonstrate how to do this safely). In flocks which vaccinate with Heptavac-P Plus against lamb dysentery and pulpy kidney, they must get colostrum from the vaccinated ewe to get any protection against this disease.

Sheep Abortion Investigations

Just a reminder that if you are having abortions in your sheep the best samples to bring in are whole aborted fetuses and most importantly **placenta**. If you do not find the lambs or placenta, please mark the ewes that have aborted, as we can blood sample them in a few weeks' time, with lab fees subsidised by the drug companies. At this point we would be able to look for exposure to the enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis- the two most common causes of abortion, both of which can be vaccinated against.

Rotavirus/coronavirus Vaccine

For a long time we have advised the use of Rotavec vaccine, as it is highly effective in boosting colostrum to protect the new born calf. There is now an alternative vaccine, **Bovigen Scour** which covers the same bugs as Rotavec vaccine – Rotavirus, Coronavirus and E coli K99. The dosing regime is the same as for Rotavec, but the dose rate is slightly different i.e. 3 ml given between 12 weeks and 3 weeks before calving. The vaccine will be slightly cheaper than Rotavec, so we will be switching to it in the near future. We will be keeping some in stock, but if you need a large amount it would help if you could ring a week in advance to ensure that we have it in when you need it.

Dairy Farmer Meeting

We are holding a meeting for dairy farmers at Usk College on 10th April 2018. Topics to be covered include lameness, pneumonia, mastitis and a review of the Ice Robotic Cow Alert System which has been in place at the college for the last breeding season and helps to detect lame cows as well as bulling cows.

Joke

Teacher: "If I gave you 2 cats and another 2 cats and another 2, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Seven."

Teacher: "No, listen carefully... If I gave you two cats, and another two cats and another two, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Seven."

Teacher: "Let me put it to you differently. If I gave you two apples, and another two apples and another two, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Six."

Teacher: "Good. Now if I gave you two cats, another two cats and another two, how many would you have?"

Johnny: "Seven!"

Teacher: "Johnny, where in the heck do you get seven from?!"

Johnny: "Because I've already got a cat!"