



# The GEORGE Farm Vets

Nearly 20% of lambs die before weaning. 80% of those losses occur during the first 10 days. Good baby lamb care can significantly increase the number of lambs raised by ewes in the flock. A realistic goal would be to limit lamb mortality to 4-5%.

After the ewe has completed delivery, she and her lamb(s) can be moved to an individual pen. This aids bonding and prevents mismothering. Soon after delivery, the ewe's udder should be checked for milk supply and potential problems, such as mastitis and blocked teats (wax plugs often need to be removed).



Lambs should be monitored closely to make sure they nurse. Lambs that have nursed will have a full stomach upon palpation. Lambs that have not nursed should be assisted. Small, weak and mismothered lambs may require assistance.

Lambing pens should be clean, dry, and well-bedded. Pens should be cleaned between ewes. Having one lambing pen per 7 to 10 ewes in the flock is usually adequate. More may be needed if lambing is closely spaced. Feed troughs and water buckets should be suspended out of reach of lambs.

When lambing occurs on pasture, ewes and lambs are not typically put into pens unless there is a problem. Sometimes, first-time lambers are placed in pens; while mature ewes lamb on pasture.

## **Disinfecting the umbilical cord**

The umbilicus of a newborn lamb is a possible route for infectious agents. To avoid infections, navel

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## **SHEEP - NEWSLETTER**

### **Care of Newborn Lambs**

stumps should be disinfected soon after birth. The navel area should be sprayed or dipped (dipping achieves greater coverage) with an antiseptic solution such as Iodine solution (branded dips range from 2-7% iodine solution).

## **Colostrum**

Colostrum is the "first milk" that a ewe produces after lambing. Colostrum contains a high level of antibodies against a variety of infectious agents. At birth, the lamb does have any antibodies because they do not cross the placenta. Colostrum also contains high levels of other nutrients that are important for lamb health and performance.

The lamb must ingest sufficient colostrum. 200ml/kg during the first 24 hours of life and 50ml/kg within the first two hours, if not sooner. Without colostrum uptake after birth a lamb would have a very poor immune system and little defence against common pathogens on farm. The ideal colostrum source for supplemental feeding of lambs is from healthy ewes in one's own flock, this is due to the ewe's colostrum having antibodies specific to pathogens on the farm.

Ewes vary in the quantity and quality of colostrum they produce. Young ewes generally produce less colostrum because they also produce less milk. Older ewes have had greater exposure to infectious agents and usually have a higher concentration of antibodies in their colostrum.

## **Complications with newborn lambs**

The major killers of newborn lambs are starvation, hypothermia, scours, and pneumonia. Lambs that experience difficult and prolonged birthing episodes are more susceptible to health problems, as are those that do not consume adequate colostrum.

## **Hypothermia**

To maintain its body temperature, a newborn lamb must produce as much heat as it is losing to the

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environment. If it cannot do this, its body temperature will start to fall. A smaller lamb will chill faster than a larger lamb. Lambs with thicker coats will lose less heat.

The quicker a ewe licks the lamb after delivery, the less vulnerable it will be to chilling. Lambs born in drafty pens or outside with no shelter from the wind will lose body heat quicker. Lambs born in colder temperatures obviously lose body heat more quickly than those born during moderate weather.

Lambs with hypothermia appear weak, gaunt, and hunched up. In severe cases, the lamb may be unable to hold its head up. The ears and mouth may feel cold. The lamb may lack suckling response. The normal body temperature for lambs is 102-103°F. Lambs with temperatures below 100°F are considered hypothermic. A rectal thermometer is useful to assess body temperature.

It is important to get colostrum in newborn hypothermic lambs to elevate the body temperature. Tube feeding is an effective means of doing this. It may also be necessary to move the lamb to a warmer environment to elevate the body temperature.

There are several ways to warm a lamb. If the lamb is wet, dry it off and wrap it in a towel. A hair dryer can be used to warm a lamb. Heat lamps should be used very carefully, hung in the corner of the pen at least 3 feet above the bedding.

In lambs over 24 hours of age, hypothermia is usually a result of starvation. Older lambs should be handled in a similar manner, except they do not need colostrum. Milk replacer can be fed with a bottle or tube feeder.

### Starvation

Lamb starvation is the number one killer of baby lambs. It may be caused by many factors: inadequate intake of colostrum, rejection by dam, mastitis, teats which are too large or close to the ground, inadequate milk production, joint injury or illness, soremouth, and/or a difficult birth.

A lamb will be found standing with its head down, ears drooping back (see picture), or it may become too weak to stand. The stomach would be empty upon palpation. Shivering, shaking and hypothermia

may follow but this hypothermic lamb is typically over 12 hours of age.



### Scours (diarrhoea)

Baby lamb scours are due to one of several bacteria: e. coli, salmonella, or clostridium perfringens type C. Adequate intake of colostrum is the best protection against scours. A clean environment is also very important. Sloppy lambing conditions predispose lambs to many potential health problems.

Fluid therapy is the most important is the most important intervention. Doing alternated feeds of milk and electrolyte fluids is best. A warm comfortable environment will also be of great benefit. If the lamb deteriorates after this initial treatment or the lamb is unable to stand please contact us for advice.

### Pneumonia

Baby lamb pneumonia is caused primarily by the bacterium Pasteurella. It is characterized by fever, increased respiratory rate, failure to nurse, and death in untreated cases. Lambs appear gaunt and lethargic. Lambs that do not consume adequate colostrum are particularly at risk for developing pneumonia.

Ventilation problems are commonly associated with outbreaks of pneumonia. Drafts and dampness contribute. Pneumonia is much more common with housed sheep than those raised on pasture. Pneumonia is treated with antibiotics, penicillin and tetracyclines are suitable options. Fluid therapy will aid recovery.

**Wishing you all a pleasant and successful lambing period!**

**Will**

