

SPRING SURVIVAL GUIDE - LAMBS (& KIDS)

Spring is a rewarding time full of new life but also challenges. The following information explains some key pointers for keeping your ewes and lambs healthy throughout spring.

Pre-Lambing Preparation

The weeks leading up to lambing is a crucial time of preparation for both the ewe and lamb to give the best chance for a strong start to life. Steps that we can influence include:

- Vaccinations
- Environment
- Nutrition
- Teat access

Vaccination

Ewes provide antibodies to the lambs through their colostrum, referred to as passive transfer. Lambs require protection from clostridial diseases (e.g. tetanus, pulpy kidney). **Vaccinating the ewe 4-6 weeks prior to lambing** protects the lamb from clostridial disease, provided they get enough colostrum.

- Clostridial vaccines include **5in1** or **7in1**
- An initial vaccination 8 weeks prior to lambing (in addition to the pre-lambing booster) will be needed if the ewe had not been vaccinated the previous year.

Environment

A lambing paddock should be chosen which allows for **easy monitoring** of lambing ewes and **provides shelter** e.g. housing, shelter belts.

Avoid lambing on steep slopes and gully paddocks. Lambs can slip/roll down steeper hills leading to mismothering, and heavily pregnant ewes can get cast on difficult terrain. If you are not able to avoid having lambing ewes on difficult terrain, make sure you regularly check out-of-sight areas.

Lambing paddocks also need to be relatively quiet and calm. Sheep are private animals when lambing. Driving through paddocks or dogs in paddocks, for example, can disturb ewes during lambing leading to mismothering of lambs.

Plan or prepare somewhere to keep orphaned lambs and sick animals. These should be kept in a warm, draught-free environment e.g. a shed with clean straw and good ventilation.



Teat access

Excessively long or daggy wool can obscure teat access for the lambs. Crutching (shearing the wool around the tail and belly) the ewes 4-6 weeks prior to lambing can help lambs feed more easily and quickly.

Nutrition

During late stages in pregnancy, a pregnant ewe's energy demands can increase to up to three times her normal needs. At the same time, a growing fetus (or twin/triplet fetuses) occupy a growing proportion of her abdomen, making it harder for her to eat enough. Feed restriction can lead to development of **ketosis/pregnancy toxaemia**.

The aim of feeding a ewe in late pregnancy (and early lactation) is therefore to give her **unrestricted access to high quality, energy dense feed**.

- Grass is the best feed
- **Unrestricted access to pasture** if possible (on larger farms this takes the form of "set stocking")
- Baleage is the best feed to supplement ewes with if you're short of grass
- Avoid feeding hay as it is low energy density
- Sheep nuts and concentrates can be fed but require **caution** and a slow transition. Feed these too fast, and you risk disrupting the rumen and causing "acidosis". Start feeding 4-6 weeks out from expected lambing and slowly increase amount fed as lambing approaches.



Ewes with triplets and twins will have higher demands than single bearing ewes. They should be given priority treatment if pasture is short.

You should put your hands on and feel your sheep regularly, it is the most accurate way to assess their condition. Their wool can hide dramatic changes in weight from visual assessment. Our vets and techs can come and look at your animals to examine if they are in appropriate condition, and to help you with your feed plan going into spring.



Lambing: Normal vs Abnormal

As ewes approach lambing, changes in the udder and vulva are often seen. Going into labour the ewe may look restless and may separate from the group. This progresses into active straining and contractions with the waterbag being visible and bursting. A lamb should be **born within 1.5 hours of the waterbag being visible**. During this time the ewe can be monitored from a distance, but interference should be limited as this may disrupt the birthing process.

Some signs to watch for indicating that assistance is required include:

- No lamb being born after 1.5 hours of the waterbag being seen
- Straining with no further signs for an extended period of time
- The ewe appearing lethargic

Complications such as the fetus being positioned the wrong way, the uterus being twisted or poorly dilated, or illness in the ewe will prevent progression of the birth. If you are concerned about how the lambing is going, contact the vet.



A quiet lambing paddock is a good lambing paddock

One of the challenging things about sheep is that we must be careful how we intervene during lambing.

If we spook a ewe just after/at the time of lambing, she may abandon the lamb. Thus, when patrolling your lambing paddocks, keep your distance from your ewes and watch from afar. Dogs should be kept out of lambing paddocks at all time.



Retained fetal membranes

A ewe will usually pass the placenta/fetal membranes within 2-3 hours lambing. In the meantime they can often hang out behind the ewe and drag around. This is normal. However, if the ewe fails to pass the membranes within 12-24 hours, seek vet advice.

Assisting ewes with lambing

If you are inexperienced with assisting ewes in a lambing, seek advice from a veterinarian or experienced lamber before attempting it yourself. However, if you are going to help a ewe here are some top tips:

- Good hygiene is essential: Wear shoulder length gloves and try and keep them clean. This will reduce risks to both you (from *zoonotic* diseases such as leptospirosis) and the ewe from uterine infection
- Ewes that need help when lambing should be given an energy drench such as Ketoaid, or Ketol Extra. This will help top up her energy to recuperate what she has used during the difficult lambing and prevent ketosis.
- Use lots of lubricant: there is no such thing as too much lubricant when helping a ewe lamb
- Be gentle: You need no more force than can be exerted with one hand when pulling on a lamb

Lamb Feeding

Lambs left on the ewe should be actively drinking milk from her **within a few hours of birth**. This initial drink of milk is essential and is referred to as **colostrum**. It provides antibodies for immunity, energy, and nutrients the lamb needs to survive. If the lamb is looking sluggish or isn't drinking, then handfeeding may be necessary. If a ewe has more than two lambs, consider hand-rearing one (or more) as the ewe often struggles to feed more than two lambs as she only has two teats.

Hand feeding lambs

Hand-feeding lambs is intensive and time consuming but can be very rewarding. However, there are a few things to be aware of before your start, including:

- Colostrum
- Not all milk replacers are equal
- Bloat & Yoghurtisation
- Hard feed

Colostrum

Colostrum is critical to lamb growth and health. It contains antibodies from the ewe that will protect the lamb for its first 4-6 weeks of life. Without these, a lamb will be at a higher risk of repeated and potentially fatal infections.

Therefore, lambs **must receive colostrum in the first 12 hours** if at all possible. If a lamb is orphaned/abandoned should be picked up a given colostrum as soon as possible.

Where to get colostrum:

- Commercial colostrum milk powders are readily available – e.g. **Jumpstart**
- A freshly lambed ewe (Collected in the first 24 hours of lactation)
- Cow colostrum – ask a friendly neighbourhood dairy farmer

Freezing colostrum in the lead up for spring is a great way to make sure you have some colostrum on hand. Defrosting colostrum must be done slowly, never heating it above 45°C, or you risk damaging the antibodies in the milk.

Colostrum should be given every 2-4 hours in the first 12-24 hours) . Aim to give your lamb 15% of its bodyweight of colostrum in first 24 hours (e.g. 600 ml for 4kg lamb split across 4-8 feeds)

If you have a lamb that is not drinking colostrum, we can **tube feed colostrum**. However, if you have not been shown how to tube feed a lamb, seek veterinary advice before attempting to do so.

Feed Plan

Day 1-2 Warm colostrum	Warm colostrum/Colostrum replacer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First 12-24 hours give warm colostrum every 2-4 hours• 4-8 times a day from then on.
Day 3-5	Warm milk replacer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4-8 feeds per day.• Of milk replace
Day 5-7	Yoghurtised milk mixed with milk replacer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gradually transition from milk/milk replacer to only to yoghurt only over 2-3 days.
Day 7 onwards	Yoghurtised milk only <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3-4 feeds a day• Start reducing to twice daily feeds from week 4 of age.

How much to feed

The aim is to feed lambs little and often. Feed your lambs **15% of their bodyweight in colostrum/milk/yoghurtised milk per day**. For example, a 4kg lamb should receive 600ml per day. This would then be split across multiple feeds e.g. 100ml each feed, six times a day for 4kg lamb.

Feeding large amounts (especially un-yoghurtised milk) in a single sitting risks causing bloat.

Every lamb is different. This feeding plan is only a guide. Talk to our team for help if you are having difficulty feeding your lambs

Abomasal Bloat & Yoghurtisation

Bloat is a serious and **often fatal** disease in bottle/hand fed lambs. **Up to 25% of bottle fed lambs will die of bloat** if not fed yoghurtised milk. It can progress rapidly meaning early diagnosis and treatment is essential.

Signs of bloat include lethargy, discomfort, not drinking and **distention of the abdomen**. It often occurs soon after a milk feed. If these signs are present the **vet should be called immediately**.

It is most common in 2-4 week old lambs, but can happen to any age bottle fed lamb.

Preventing bloat:

- **Yoghurtising milk** – ALL hand-reared lambs should use this from about 1 week of age
- Avoid feeding milk warm – try **room temperature** or slightly cooler
- Maintain **consistency** when feeding – milk concentration, volume, and feed timing
- Avoid lambs **drinking too quickly**
 - Don't squeeze the bottle.
 - Ensure the hole in the teat end isn't too large and that the teat is not cracked.

Choosing your milk powder/replacer

It is important to choose a milk powder/milk replacer that is designed for lambs. Calf/all purpose milk replacer can be ok in a pinch, but it is poorly balanced for lambs in the long term.

We recommend Anlamb, lamb specific, milk replacer powder. Or Ankid for goats.



Hard Feed & Grass

Lambs should have hard feed available from birth. This can include grass, hay, or meal (e.g. NRM Lambstart). **Hard feed is critical to rumen (stomach) development**, which will have lifelong impact on their growth and health. They may not show much interest in these feeds to begin with, but make sure they always have some available.

Yoghurtised Milk recipe

To make 1L of yoghurtised milk:

- Anlamb milk powder = 200g
OR correct amount of milk powder for brand for 1L of milk
- 750mL warm water
- 2 big tablespoons of plain yoghurt with live cultures

Mix all ingredients together and dilute with a little cold water.

Allow to incubate and thicken overnight at a slightly warm temperature e.g. hot water cupboard, easiyo container. Top up with cold water in the morning to make a liquid consistency before feeding at recommended rates.

Mixture can be stored in the fridge for up to a week – larger quantities can be made a stored.

Difficulty getting your lamb to drink yoghurtised milk?

Lambs usually like the yoghurtised milk. If you are having troubles with them drinking it, it is usually because it is still too thick.

- Stir it more and add a small amount of cold water to thin it out.
- Remember the teat end is a small hole to get the mix through!
- Lambs can be transitioned onto the yoghurtised milk over time if you are still struggling to get the lamb to drink it after the consistency has been corrected.

Weaning

Weaning is when the lambs cease being fed milk. Milk feed frequency and volume should be decreased over the weeks leading up to weaning. Weaning is usually done at 8-12 weeks old or when the lambs are consuming at least 200g of hard feed/pasture per day.

Routine treatments

Vaccinations

If the ewes were vaccinated for clostridial disease prior to lambing, then the lambs will be protected by maternal antibodies until weaning. If the ewe didn't receive a vaccination prior to lambing, or if the lamb was orphaned, then the lamb will have no protection against clostridial disease. Docking is a high-risk time for clostridial disease and if they do not have protection through the milk then a vaccination to provide immediate short-term protection, such as 'Lamb vaccine', is needed at the time of docking.

All lambs, whether they have been protected by their mother's milk or not, should be started on their own vaccinated program where they build their own long-term immunity. Vaccines such as 5in1 or 7in1 should be given from 6 weeks old with a booster 4-6 weeks later and then yearly boosters after that.

The 7in1 vaccine also gives protection against leptospirosis which is a disease of concern for human health as well as animal health. Humans can become infected from infected animals' shedding it through urine. This is particularly important to vaccinate for if animals are being handled regularly.

Docking and Castration

Docking is the removal of the lamb's tail when they are **2-6 weeks old**. This should be done to reduce faecal contamination which can predispose to health issues such as flystrike. Castration of male lambs is usually done at the same time. Docking/castrating involves putting a very tight 'rubber ring' around the tail/testicles causing blood flow to stop and the tail/testicles to fall off within the next week. Pain relief can be provided for these procedures if it is done by a veterinarian. Some important considerations if you are performing these procedures yourself are:

- Lambs should be protected against clostridial disease – see vaccinations section above
- Place the tail ring below the hairless 'V' on the underside of the tail. The tail should still be long enough to cover the vulva. It is now an animal welfare offence (with fines associated) to dock a tail too short.
- When castrating, ensure that both testicles are placed through the ring.
- Monitor areas for infection – if there is discharge, reddening or the lamb is lethargic or off feed then contact the vet



Pain and Welfare

Docking & Castration of lambs is a painful procedure. Lambs often display behaviours of discomfort such as lying down and bleating for several hours after docking but should be feeding again within the day.

We recommend giving pain relief at time of docking/castration. Pain relief can be given in the form of local anaesthetic or anti-inflammatory medication. For optimal pain relief, make a booking for your lamb to be docked/castrated under local anaesthetic.

Note: It is illegal to castrate or dock a lamb over 6 months old without a veterinarian. However, as we usually do them <6 weeks old this should not be a problem.

Drenching and parasites

Drenching for gastrointestinal parasites ('worms') in lambs should start at weaning. Lambs are more susceptible to worms than adult sheep so regular drenching is needed while they build immunity. Usually, a drench is given every 28 days for 4-5 drenches from weaning. Faecal egg counts can then be used to determine the need for drenching.

Common Diseases

Scours

Scours occur for a variety of reasons, from nutritional to infectious disease. Due to lambs having small reserves, fluid and nutrient losses can quickly lead to severe dehydration and death if not treated promptly. If significant scours are seen rehydration using lamb-specific electrolytes is important. If the lamb is off feed, lethargic, or if there is blood in the faeces then it should be brought into the vets.

Death in scouring lambs is usually the result of either dehydration or hypoglycaemia, so **do not stop feeding** scouring lambs, ensure they have plenty available to drink, and give extra feeds of electrolytes (either via a bottle or lamb tube feeder)

If your lamb is not drinking seek vet advice.

Anti-inflammatory treatment can help get a lamb to drink again and has a significant impact on survival of scouring lambs. Consult your vet about using anti-inflammatories in scouring lambs

Hypoglycaemia

Lambs are born with minimal energy stores so if they fail to drink soon after birth then they can rapidly develop hypothermia and hypoglycaemia. Signs of this include depression, weakness, or being comatose. Lambs showing these signs need rapid intervention.

Severely affected animals can have **honey or dextrose syrup** (available in the baking aisle) **smear on their gums**. This will give them a small amount of glucose to help them recover. Severely affected animals can be brought into the vets where we can attempt intravenous therapies and other support.

Lambs that are weak but can still stand can be tubed with colostrum and then dried and **warmed slowly**.

Lambs warmed too quickly without being fed can burn through glucose faster as they warm up. This can tip them into hypoglycaemic crisis and potentially kill them.

We recommend smearing honey or dextrose syrup on the gums of any weak, cold lamb while you warm it up to reduce the chances of hypoglycaemia and potentially death as they warm.



Do not tube colostrum unless a suckle reflex is present.

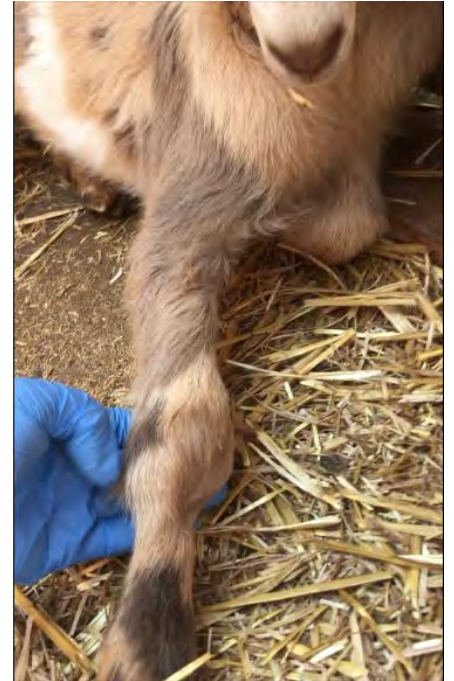
Ensure that the correct technique is used for tubing the lamb to avoid going into the windpipe/lungs. If you have never done this before seek advice before attempting it yourself. If the lamb cannot stand then they will require more rigorous treatment by a vet.

Navel ill

Hand-reared lambs should have their navels sprayed with an iodine or betadine spray shortly after birth. It is not practical to do this to all lambs, but if catching them for any reason, it would not hurt to spray their navels in the paddock. This can help prevent bacterial infections of the navel. If the cord is wet, swollen (larger than a pencil), painful, or there is any discharge call your vet. Navel infections can spread to the internal organs and joints (joint ill), which can lead to severe illness and death.

Joint ill

This disease usually follows navel infection, but bacteria can also spread from bacteria from the gut after scours or pneumonia. This disease often involves one or more joints, often the front knee or carpus. Lambs appear lame suddenly, the affected joint is hot and painful and there is no history of an injury. This disease needs to be treated aggressively with antibiotics and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories, please call your vet as soon as you can if you notice this.



Good Luck!

