



CARE OF ORPHAN LAMBS

NEW PLYMOUTH VET GROUP

Looking after an orphaned lamb can be a very rewarding experience providing everything goes well. Here are a few guide lines to help make rearing your lamb easier.

Management

Feeding

At birth, lambs have no immunity as the ewes placenta does not allow for the transfer of antibodies to the lamb during pregnancy. Therefore the only source of antibodies to the lamb is through the ewes first milk known as colostrum. The antibodies in the colostrum help the lamb fight off infections and disease early in life. Colostrum is thick, yellow in colour and very high in protein and fat, providing important source of nutrition to the new born lamb.. It is essential that the lamb gets this within 6-12 hours of birth as after this the lambs gut can no longer absorb the antibodies. Lambs require at least 200ml in the first 6-12 hrs.

If you are unsure if your new born lamb has had any colostrum, a ewe that has recently lambed can be milked and the colostrum fed straight to the lamb. There are also some artificial colostrum products available such as Jumpstart™ or Halen New Born™. Be aware that homemade colostrum recipes do not contain antibodies for the lamb and should not be used. Lambs can be fed colostrum for the first 24 hours before weaning onto lambs milk powder.

In order to prevent abomasal bloat it is best to feed little and often with never more than 250 ml per feed. Milk should be fed at room temperature and a yogurt culture can be added to it. Lambs should be fed based on their weight. A lamb requires 10-15 % of their body weight in milk. For example a newborn 4kg lamb needs 400 ml-600 ml total of milk, split into 6 feeds of 75-100 ml. As the lamb grows, the amount of milk can be gradually increased. 1 litre daily split into 3-4 feeds should suit most lambs over 3 weeks old. Never feed a lamb until its stomach starts to bulge or does not want any more to drink.

In an emergency calf milk powder can be used but mix at 200 gm per litre (rather than 125 g/litre for calves) and do not water it down.

Some lambs need to be taught how to suckle from a bottle. Place the teat in the lambs mouth to encourage it to drink. This may require some patience but the lamb will eventually learn.

Weaning

Weaning is the gradual transition of the lambs diet from milk onto solid feed. Lambs require access to grass and hay to allow for development of the digestive system. Lambs will begin to nibble on solid food soon after birth and will be fully eating grass by 4- 6 weeks old. Hard feed such as Sheep Nuts™ or Multifeed™ nuts can also be fed. Weaning can begin as early as 6 weeks of age but most lambs benefit from milk feeding up to 12-14 weeks of age. At weaning the lamb should be eating solid food for a minimum of 10 days and drinking water freely. Weaned lambs should be given access to high quality pasture to ensure continued growth rates. It is important that that the lambs are not grazing in an area where they can come in contact with any poisonous plants as they will nibble on anything given the chance. They should have access to fresh water at all times.

Housing

Lambs require a warm, dry and draught free shelter with access to pasture. Sheep are social animals so are happiest if reared in a group. This will also help the lamb to learn that it is a sheep rather than a human! Woolovers™ lamb covers can provide extra warmth and insulation if needed. Old woolen jerseys with leg holes cut out also work well.

COMMON HEALTH ISSUES

Vaccinations

It is recommended that all lambs are vaccinated to protect against a number of diseases caused by Clostridia bacteria. These bacteria live in the soil and cause diseases such as Tetanus, Pulpy kidney, Black leg, Malignant Oedema and Blacks disease.

Generally animals are only at risk to infection after an injury. Risk factors include lambing, docking and yarding injuries. Rapidly growing animals that are eating a lot of supplementary feed are also at risk. Once there is bruised tissue present, the bacteria multiply and produce toxins which can cause sudden death with few clinical signs. There is nothing more disheartening than finding a healthy strong lamb suddenly dead. Once a lamb has been given its initial vaccinations, a booster will be required annually.

The type and timing of vaccine used will depend on a few factors:

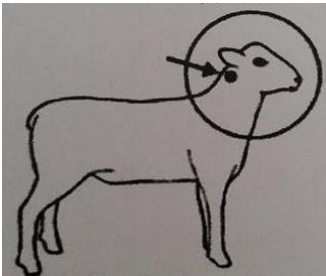
Ewe is vaccinated 2-6 weeks prior to lambing and lamb has received adequate colostrum from ewe:

Age of lamb	Type of vaccine	
4 weeks/ Docking	No vaccine required.	Lamb is protected by antibodies in the ewes colostrum. Protection lasts for up to 12 weeks.
Sensitizer: Weaning	5 in 1/Covexin 10 in 1	
Booster: 4-6 weeks later	5 in 1/Covexin 10 in 1	

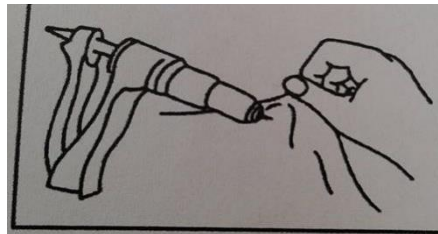
Ewe is not vaccinated or lamb did not receive colostrum from ewe:

Age of lamb	Type of vaccine	
4 weeks/Docking	Lamb Vaccine	Provides immediate short term protection for 2-3 weeks against tetanus and pulpy kidney
Sensitizer: Weaning	5 in 1/Covexin 10 in 1	
Booster : 4-6 weeks later	5 in 1/Covexin 10 in 1	

Correct vaccination technique:



The recommended vaccination site: The anterior half of the neck.

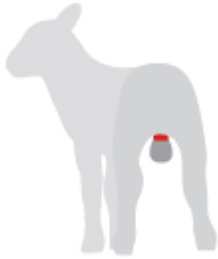


The vaccine should be placed under the skin.
 'Tent' the skin prior to injection.

Docking

The docking of the tails and removal of testicles in ram lambs should ideally be done before 2 weeks old and no older than 6 weeks old. If you are not intending to breed from your ram lamb then it is wise to castrate him as pet rams can become dangerous. The docking of tails reduces the risk of fly strike by preventing the buildup of faeces around the bottom. The easiest way to dock a lamb is to use rubber rings and an elastrator. A veterinarian can do this procedure if you have any concerns. Docking lambs over 6 months old requires pain relief.

Correct docking technique:



The testicles are pushed into the scrotum. A rubber ring is then placed above the testicles but below the teats.



A rubber ring is placed over the tail. The tail should be left long enough to cover the vulva in females and a similar length in males.

Abomasal bloat

One of the most common causes of death in orphan lambs is due to bloat. Orphan lambs are fed higher volumes of milk in fewer feeds than they would when feeding from the ewe. This makes them prone to getting bloat. The bloat is caused by an overgrowth of bad bacteria in the fore stomach (abomasum). These bacteria feed on the lactose found in the milk, converting it to lactic acid which leads to gas production and bloating of the abomasum. Bloat can cause death either through compression of other body organs or through rupture of the abomasum.

Symptoms of bloat are a distended tummy and signs of discomfort such as kicking the stomach and constant sitting and standing up. Massaging the tummy and getting the lamb to walk around can help relieve some gas, however if symptoms persist contact a veterinarian.

The best way to prevent bloat is not to over feed your lamb. Never feed a lamb until its stomach starts to bulge or does not want any more to drink. The milk should also be fed at room temperature rather than feeding warm. It is also important to prevent overload of milk by making sure the teat hole is the correct size. If the milk is free flowing from the teat when the bottle is tipped upside down then the hole is too big. Another prevention method is to add a yogurt culture to the milk powder mixture.

Method for feeding cultured milk powder (Amount for 1 lamb, makes 1 litre of milk).

- Mix 200 g of milk powder with 500 ml of warm water.
- Add 25ml of acidophilus yogurt and mix thoroughly.
- Place in a warm area and allow to thicken over night.
- Top up with 500 ml water and mix thoroughly the next morning.
- Feed milk at room temperature.
- For future use, save 25 ml of the thickened mixture as a replacement to Acidophilus yogurt.
- The mixture will keep for 5 days in the fridge.

Scours

The most common cause of diarrhea in lambs is related to change in nutrition rather than an infection. However whatever the cause, the general treatment principals are the same. The most important factor is to prevent dehydration which is done by feeding plenty of electrolytes. Depending on the size of the lamb 100-200 ml doses 3-5 times a day is recommended. Milk feeds can be introduced slowly as the diarrhea resolves. Electrolytes can be purchased from the clinic or your local farm store. If symptoms persist or the lambs condition is deteriorating, consult a veterinarian.

Navel Ill/Joint Infections

This occurs in the newborn lamb where bacteria travel up through the umbilical cord and become lodged in the joints, leading to an infection. Affected lambs will become lame and have puffy inflamed joints. Consult a veterinarian with regards to antibiotic treatment. Prevention involves ensuring that newborn lambs get adequate amounts of colostrum, are kept in a clean environment and spraying fresh umbilical cords with iodine.

Worms

Once lambs are eating grass they become susceptible to picking up worm larvae from the pasture. Signs of worms include scouring, weight loss and poor growth rates. Lambs will require drenching from around 4 weeks from the start of grazing and will need to be drenched every 28 days until the lambs first winter. The worm burden in the pasture can be reduced by cross grazing with older sheep or other species such as cattle.

Entropion

This is an inherited disorder where the lamb is born with eyelids that turn inside out. It may affect one or both eyes, causing the eye to weep and leads to damage of the cornea due to irritation of the eyelashes. If left untreated, it can cause ulceration of the cornea and blindness. In some cases only manual correction is needed. The eyelids can be rolled down after every feed and bathed in warm saline. However others may require surgical correction by a veterinarian.