

Herd Health Planning

Scouring and watery mouth



Scouring

There are many different causes of scouring in lambs, including bacteria, viruses, protozoa and intestinal parasites, as well as poisons. The clinical signs tend to be similar in all cases of diarrhoea in lambs, and laboratory examinations are required to accurately identify the cause. Samples submitted to the laboratory should include faecal samples (20 to 30 ml if possible) and carcasses. For a definitive diagnosis of colibacillosis an acutely ill, untreated lamb should be sacrificed.

Pathogenic strains of *Escherichia coli* are associated with scouring and deaths in young lambs usually less than one week of age. Affected lambs scour profusely and become weak and dehydrated. Some develop a terminal colisepticaemia but death is usually associated with dehydration.

Watery Mouth

Watery mouth is an important disease of neonatal lambs, especially in the indoor situation. It is most common in lambs between 6 and 48 hours old and can cause severe losses, with up to a quarter of lambs affected and mortality of those affected as high as 80%. Young lambs between 12 and 72 hours old become dull and refuse to suckle and then develop a characteristic wet chin from excess salivation. There is often a puffiness around the eyes and profuse tearing. The lamb will deteriorate quickly become reluctant to stand often with a distinct distension of the abdomen ("rattle belly") and sometimes with diarrhoea. The affected lamb will die within hours.

Preventing Scouring and Watery Mouth

There are as yet no effective vaccines or antisera for watery mouth or for most causes of scouring in young lambs. Good hygiene is essential to prevent build up of infection in lambing areas. Thorough cleaning of lambing pens or at least a layer of fresh straw between sheep to act as a barrier between newborn lambs and residual infection may reduce the challenge. Any lambs which do scour should be immediately isolated and the pen which they have occupied disinfected with a DEFRA approved product. Winter shearing and dagging of the ewes prior to housing may also reduce the challenge.

Despite these precautions and especially in periods of bad weather infection tends to build up as lambing progresses. If scouring becomes a problem in this situation, lambs born indoors should not be kept confined for more than 36 to 48 hours after birth, provided they are

strong enough to be turned outside. The sooner they can be put out into rested fields the better. At birth lambs' navels should all be carefully dipped in tincture of iodine. As well as acting as an antiseptic, the astringent action of the iodine helps to seal off the umbilical cord.

The most effective method of prevention is to ensure early and adequate consumption of colostrum by newborn lambs. Lambs are less likely to pick up infections if they suckle plenty of colostrum during the first 6 hours of life or if they are prevented from ingesting significant numbers of bacteria. Early detection of lambs not getting enough colostrum is of paramount importance. This could be because the ewe has not produced enough colostrum, competition from litter mates, hypothermia or other causes of disease.

Supplementation of such lambs with either stored excess ewe colostrum, pooled cow colostrum or one of the commercial colostrum products will help reduce the incidence of watery mouth and also of other infectious neonatal diseases.

Appropriate feeding of ewes, particularly with a diet containing good quality protein, is vital during the last four weeks of pregnancy to ensure that plenty of quality colostrum is produced especially for those carrying multiple lambs or those in poor body condition.

The application of rubber rings for castration and tailing should not be carried out during the first day, as this may discourage lambs from suckling colostrum.

Vaccination of the ewes with an *E. coli* vaccine may reduce the levels of colibacillosis and watery mouth. The lambs still need to get enough colostrum to get any protection. No vaccines are currently licensed specifically for sheep but your vet may be able to prescribe a vaccine licensed for another species under the cascade system.

Managing the risk of scouring and watery mouth

Lowest risk

1. Good hygiene in lambing area, appropriate feeding of ewes pre-lambing and lambs taking in a good supply of quality colostrum
2. Good hygiene in lambing area and adequate colostrum intakes –(unlikely if ewes not fed properly)
3. Adequate colostrum intakes but poor hygiene in lambing area
4. Poor hygiene in lambing area and poor colostrum intakes

Highest risk

scouring and watery mouth decisions

Is there a problem?

Date:

Condition	Cases – this year	Losses – this year	Target for next year
Scouring			
Watery mouth			

Causes of scouring diagnosed this year	
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Is any action planned?

Yes/No

Planned action	Target groups	Dates	Product
Colostrum for lambs	Lambs at risk of not getting colostrum		Stored frozen colostrum
Treatment of scouring lambs - rehydration	Scouring lambs		
Treatment of scouring lambs - specific	Scouring lambs		
E. coli vaccination of ewes	Ewes and replacements		

Other decisions

Improve late pregnancy feeding of ewes to improve colostrum?	Yes/No
Analyse forage and formulate rations timely?	Yes/No
Winter shearing and dagging of the ewes prior to housing?	Yes/No
Action to make sure good colostrum intake in lambs?	Yes/No
Hygiene in lambing area – cleaning and disinfection between ewes?	Yes/No
Isolation of scouring lambs and cleaning and disinfection of pens?	Yes/No
Turnout lambs as soon as possible after lambing?	Yes/No
No application of rubber rings for castration and tailing during the first day?	Yes/No

Flock health planning scouring and watery mouth review date: