

### Ewe abortion blood sampling

Having issues with barren or aborting ewes this year? Or an option to be aware of if lambing isn't as smooth as usual. Subsidised blood sampling to test for enzootic abortion (EAE) and toxoplasma is available. Samples can be taken from 6-8 barren or aborted ewes which have not had toxoplasma or EAE vaccines.

To take advantage of this offer, call us to book in your blood samples.



### Online lambing course

This year we are running online lambing courses, presented by our vets Matt and Yasmine over a Zoom meeting. The course is packed with handy tips including preparation for lambing, practical lambing skills and care of the newborn lamb. Cost to attend is £40 ex VAT.

**7pm - 8.30pm Thursday 11th March**

To book in for the lambing course or for more information, please ring the practice.

### Lambing boxes

We are able to supply a lambing box with all the essentials for £60. The lambing box includes thermometer, set of sleeve length disposable plastic gloves, bottle of 10% iodine, lambing snare and 2 ropes, 1 bottle of veterinary lubricant, lamb stomach tubing kit and a bottle of Ewe Go. Lambing boxes can be ordered to pick up at Holly Tree and Whaley Bridge.

### Medicine courses for sheep farmers

Bridget will be running Mastering Medicines courses for sheep farmers on Tuesday 9th March 3.30pm-6pm and Wednesday 10th March 10.30am - 1pm. Attendance at this course will allow you to meet Red Tractor Guidelines for the safe administration of medicines and costs £55 (excl. VAT) per person.

**For more information or to book a place, please contact the office on 01477 571000 and ask for Vicky.**

### Lamb Losses – what causes them? What can you do about it?

**Unfortunately, not all lambs survive those first few early days of life, whether it be because of disease, cold or just those irritating accidents like being lay on. Though we can't do a lot about the weather (particularly if you already lamb inside), and even the best shepherd couldn't watch every ewe in every pen 24/7 to stop those unfortunate accidents.**

**The industry target for lambs born alive but lost between 0-48hours old is 6% and many farms are proving that this is possible. In 2011, this was found to be around 15% in Welsh flocks, and in the UK a range between 4-21% in lowland flocks.**

**So, what causes lamb losses in those first few days? In this article we will cover the common causes of early losses, and what you can do about them.**

#### Watery Mouth disease - AKA Rattle belly

- Lambs are lethargic, fail to suck, salivate a lot, bloat, and often retain their meconium (first muck).
- It is caused by a dramatic and rapid overgrowth of E. coli and the release of associated toxins. Infections originate from environmental bacteria, particularly in dirty, wet pens/sheds and from dirty fleece on ewes back ends' and tails.
- The bacteria can overgrow rapidly in the gut due to inadequate or delayed colostrum intake, and the risk is higher in lambs of low birthweight, or from ewes in poor conditions, from difficult births or due to mismothering.
- Treatment – the disease is often fatal, with lambs quickly progressing into a coma then death. Affected lambs require frequent oral rehydration at 50ml/kg, an enema to aid defecation and early cases can sometimes respond to antibiotics.
- Control – preventing disease is far better than trying to treat. By far the most important aspects are hygiene, and colostrum. Ensuring lambing sheds are clean throughout lambing – even moving ewes to other sheds/outside towards the end of lambing (weather permitting). Lambs also need to receive enough colostrum - 50ml/kg in the first 2 hours, reaching 200ml/kg by 24 hours.
- We can assess colostrum absorption in lambs by taking blood from those lambs up to 7 days old which can flag up a possible issue with intakes or with ewe nutrition leading to poor quantity/quality.
- Routine antibiotic treatment of lambs is no longer appropriate, and the industry has made huge steps to reduce reliance on this outdated practice. There are much better ways to prevent watery mouth – with the main being correct ewe nutrition and colostrum intakes – it is nearly impossible to give a lamb watery mouth if it has had adequate colostrum.

**CONTINUED OVERLEAF**

## Umbilical Infection - Navel ill

- Largely down to unhygienic conditions around the time of birth or with inadequate navel treatment. Cases can increase during poor weather and are often higher in male lambs as urination prevents the navel from drying.
- The infection can stay localised to the navel or can spread to many other locations in the body – sometimes delayed for weeks before causing problems.
- Treatment of early cases can be successful; however, this must be detected early and needs to continue for at least 5 days.
- Prevention – Navel ill is best prevented, and that is best done using a 10% iodine solution to the navel as soon as possible after birth – ideally under 15 minutes. For best results, this should then be repeated after 2-4 hours. Blue spray is not effective for preventing navel infections and will only lead to increased resistance to antibiotics on the farm.



## Infectious polyarthritis – Joint ill

- Bacteria can colonise any joints not just those of the legs, however the knee, hock, fetlocks, and stifles are the most affected.
- The infections enter the joint through the bloodstream, with bacteria entering via the gut, airways, or navels. The challenge of bacteria is much higher when hygiene is poor, or colostrum intake is inadequate.
- Streptococcus dysgalactiae is the most common cause of joint ill, with infections picked up early in life. The joints are usually hot, swollen, and painful and affected lambs will quickly lose condition and stop growing. We can also see cases caused by Erysipelis. The cases can be differentiated by taking joint samples for culture – we can also assess antibiotic susceptibility at the same time.
- Treatment is often with penicillin, administered daily for at least 5 days (i.e., not long acting). Anti-inflammatory is also important for improved recovery.
- Lambs with joint ill will often exhibit some level of lameness despite 'successful' treatment due to the damage caused to the joint surface. If lameness is still extreme after a long course of antibiotics, the lamb should be euthanased for welfare reasons.
- Prevention – this is focussed on reducing susceptibility to infection and exposure to bacteria. Ensuring colostrum intakes and thorough navel care is paramount to success. As with oral antibiotics, injecting for prevention of joint ill is now an outdated practice and no longer accepted across the veterinary and sheep farming industry. Efforts should be made to tackle the disease without relying on antibiotics, instead using these for treatment – and we are here to help you with that – just give us a call!

## Hypothermia (moderate = 37-39°C, severe = <37°C)

- Cold is a huge killer of lambs, but there are a few things we can do to help them stay warm. Lambing inside has big benefits, as does a belly full of colostrum. If a lamb does get cold, knowing how to warm it up correctly is vital. For moderate hypothermia, a feed of warm colostrum and spell under a heat lamp will work wonders.
- For severe hypothermia, things are more complex.

If under 6 hours old, lambs still have brown fat to provide energy, so efforts focus on heat and drying. Move the lamb under a lamp, drying the fleece and, once they are able to hold their head up, tubing with some warm colostrum.

If they are over 6 hours old, the same applies as above, however we need to provide some extra energy as the brown fat will already have been depleted. This usually takes the form of an injection of glucose directly into the lamb's abdomen. Have a chat with one of the vets if you're not sure how to do this – it is quite uncommon to need to, if you lamb inside, thankfully.

## Lamb post mortem offer

Whilst some losses can be tolerated, it's important to investigate early if losses are increasing to try to prevent losses going forward. To tackle this, we are offering a new service this year, at a reduced introductory rate.

For just £30 we will post-mortem up to 3 new-born (up to 2 weeks old) lambs to investigate the causes. To be able to offer this reduced price we aim to tie it in with other visits in the area – or do them whilst we are already on farm for other reasons, so we may not come immediately like we do with other calls. We can also offer this service at the Whaley Bridge branch; however, we will need you to wait and take the lambs away with you afterwards for fallen-stock collection from your farm. If we suggest samples are taken for testing, these will be charged as usual according to lab fees.

If you have any questions, please get in touch on the usual numbers or via any of the vets.



### FARM OFFICES Lower Withington

The Barn, Holly Tree Farm, Holmes Chapel Road,  
Lower Withington, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 9DT  
Tel: 01477 571000 Email: [hollytree@wmvets.co.uk](mailto:hollytree@wmvets.co.uk)

### Whaley Bridge Farm Branch

Block B, Ringstones Industrial Estate,  
Whaley Bridge, High Peak, Derbyshire, SK23 7PD  
Tel: 01663 732564

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