

Dalehead Annual Sheep Meeting 2021

Questions & Answers

Part one: Presented by Karen Swindlehurst

Q: We've always used Spectam, in my health plan it was recommended not to use on every lamb, even maybe not using until later lambing, is this not a risk to my early lambers in my pedigree flock?

A: This shouldn't be a risk if enough colostrum is given, hygiene is good and pens are kept clean. In one of the slides we showed 30% resistance to Spectam, so it maybe that it is not working very well on your farm anyway, particularly if you've used it for a lot of years. If an antibiotic is used as a blanket treatment for all lambs it can be that you develop resistance, meaning the drug stops working effectively.

Q: What is the best disinfectant for lambing pens between sheep, is lime any good?

A: Yes, lime is good as an anti-bacterial and a drying agent but you have to take care, lime is caustic and can cause burns, damaging skin on young lambs, ewe udders and teats. It can also cause skin irritation for the farmer. Pens can be emptied out and steam cleaned but this takes time as you need to allow drying time between sheep. Removing the bedding but leaving a damp dirty base can cause problems. An alternative is to remove gross material only, keeping it as dry as you can. Use an antibacterial drying powder and then plenty of fresh bedding. Wet disinfectants can only really be used if you have time to fully clean and dry the pens, otherwise the damp pen will act as a breeding pool for bacteria.

Q: Would you not recommend using blue oxytet spray on navels, would you always use iodine?

A: Yes, I would always use a strong iodine product on navels. Iodine dries the navel as well as acting as a disinfectant. The drying is important as it prevents absorption of bacteria. Blue spray isn't as effective at this. Using oxytet would also be an unnecessary use of antibiotic.

Q: Can we use Metacam in lambs? Is this the best anti inflammatory?

A: Metacam is a good anti inflammatory pain relief. However, we must be very careful with dosing; a lamb would only require a very small dose. If the lamb is poorly or dehydrated NSAIDs like Metacam can cause damage to the kidneys. If a lamb is dehydrated and needs pain relief we must ensure we are getting plenty of fluids into them and improve their hydration. Use a 1ml syringe to ensure accurate dosing.

Q: Does anyone have experience of using pine shavings in lambing pens rather than straw?

A: I have heard from some clients, who have moved from straw to shavings with reports that it has helped reduced instances of watery mouth. Shavings should have a good drying effect as bedding and people have said it can make cleaning out easier. Pine shavings are thought to have anti-bacterial properties.

This question was put out to the audience; one response agreed that it helped to keep bedding dry, but due to low incidences of watery mouth were unable to comment on this.

Part two: Presented by Neil Roberts.

Q: Should we be purchasing a refractometer to test the quality of colostrum on farm?

A: Buying a refractometer to test colostrum quality would be the icing on the cake. A great starting point with colostrum quality is to have a look at how viscous, thick and gloopy it is. Good quality colostrum should be nice and thick with a dark yellow colour. I wouldn't expect the majority of farmers to go and buy a refractometer. Having said that a refractometer can be picked up for around £15.00 and can give confidence that the colostrum you are using is good as it should be. You can also keep checking colostrum to see how the quality can decline over the first day and how it varies between ewes.

Q: Is it worth continuing artificial colostrums over a few days given that it has fewer antibodies in it?

A: No. As we said earlier in the presentation the lamb's gut becomes less permeable to antibodies after the first 6 hours and acid in the stomach begins to break down antibodies. If you start to give a product with lower iGg antibodies it will have a minimal beneficial effect, the secret is to get it in early; in the first 6 hours. Up to 24hr there is some benefit to feeding colostrum but after that it is very minimal.

Q: If you have colostrum that is thick like custard, is it ok to add milk powder to make it thinner and therefore easier to give?

A: I personally would make every effort to feed colostrum in its thick gloopy form, as it is likely to be of good quality. We need to get 20g of antibodies into a lamb to give it protection, if the antibodies are concentrated because the colostrum is thick that is actually a very good thing, it would be counter productive to water it down. Do persevere with getting thick colostrum in and if there's any spare its a good idea to collect and freeze some so that it can be feed to other lambs.

Q: We've used Locatim for calves in the past, is there an equivalent product or could we use this?

A: Locatim is a concentrated antibody source, which includes Rotavirus, K99 E.coli and Coronavirus antibodies. It should be given in addition to the mother's colostrum not as a replacement to boost the calves' immune system. Rotavirus can be incriminated in lamb scours. Although it is off data sheet, Locatim has been given to scouring lambs as a supplement. You certainly couldn't use it instead of the mother's colostrum but in a situation where we may see outbreaks of scour it is something that could be considered, on a case by case basis.

Q: What is the best method of disinfecting lamb bottles and tubes etc.?

A: Firstly, rinse tubes and bottles in cold water to help remove grease and milk deposits. Then wash in hot soapy water. To sterilise, various disinfectants work, but sterilising tablets such as 'Milton' used for sterilising baby bottles can be quite easy to use. A bowl can be set up ready for soaking equipment in.