

# Pointers for lamb vaccination

Vet **Richard Knight** makes time to check medicines datasheets, which can be updated randomly online by manufacturers



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It's at times of the year like this, when everyone's run ragged, that I like to take time to read about things that I might have forgotten, so I don't make a mistake.

Medicines datasheets are an ever-changing document, and since they can be altered by pharmaceutical companies easily online now, we must constantly check for updates.

I'm thinking particularly about vaccinating lambs now, where many will be getting to that two to three weeks of age milestone that means they are now eligible for a range of Clostridial and *Pasteurella* vaccines.

Maternally derived antibodies (MDA), otherwise known as antibodies from the ewe's colostrum, will persist for between two and 12 weeks after birth. Lamb

dysentery and pulpy kidney MDA, will persist for eight and 12 weeks respectively with up to four weeks for pasteurellosis. Whether or not the lamb has adequate MDA depends on whether the ewe got her annual booster four to six weeks before lambing or not.

## COLOSTRUM

The other dependant factors are whether or not the lamb got sufficient colostrum\* soon after birth (within the first four to eight hours) and the ewe's health status. Good luck in finding that out! Seriously, though, these factors are vitally important and often key to whether the preventative process works.

Vaccinating lambs too young may mean that the MDA interferes with the immune response to the vaccine, leading to a subsequent vaccination failure. Once they're over three weeks of age you can be confident that it's safe to do and that it'll work OK too.

## VACCINE CHOICE

Vaccine choice is important too – some vaccines are not recommended as a female breeding stock vaccine as they contains no component for lamb dysentery (*C. perfringens* type B), therefore

boosting a primary course of that in 12 months' time, pre-lambing, would also be ineffective.

## POST-MORTEM

If lambs are dying, it's usually a good idea to recommend a post-mortem, especially if you end up being the first point of contact rather than the vet. A diagnosis has important ramifications for vaccines chosen, time of intervention and future action. Lambs from suitably

vaccinated ewes should not be dying of pulpy kidney disease (*C. perfringens* type D) at eight weeks old, but if that is happening, suggesting a vaccine failure for whatever reason, then vaccination of lambs with a suitable product from two weeks of age and a booster four weeks later could well cap the problem off. It always pays to read the label!

\* 300ml for a 3kg lamb and pro rata, or 15 minutes strong sucking from an udder known to contain milk.


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