

Care of Orphan and Pet Lambs

Rearing of lambs is not as straight forward as it may seem and it is important to get things right from the start to ensure an easy and successful process. Sick lambs can be reared and saved, treatments are outlined below. If your wish is a pet for the children you are best to start with a healthy robust lamb.

Selection of pets – Selection of lambs is very important. You want to ensure the best start. The following are what you want to look for.

1. Healthy, bright looking, dry and not skinny.
2. At least two days old and fed colostrum from ewe or straight off the ewe.
3. Navel dry and clean, no swollen joints, firm faeces, eyes bright with no discharge.
4. Good suck reflex and preferably already trained to the bottle.

Warming – When weak lambs are found it is important to warm and dry them. Warm water bottles or heat lamps are the best for this, at a safe distance to avoid burning. Bedding should be dry and disposable like straw or paper. Once the lamb is warm and starts bleating it is ready to be fed.

Feeding the lamb – Correct feeding technique and good hygiene are important to get good growth and avoid scours and other problems.

Colostrum is vital to give the lamb a good immune system. It is best absorbed in the first 24 hours of the lambs life. After that it is just digested. If the lamb does not get this it will not have any immediate source of antibodies to fight infection, and scours or other problems can result.

The best source of colostrum is of course ewe's milk direct from mum but that is not always possible. Colostrum milked from another freshly lambded ewe is the next best option. If that is also not possible then fresh cow colostrum from a cow just calved will do. If that fails then colostrum substitutes are available but are expensive and not as effective.

Lambs should get at least one day (500ml) of colostrum fed in 6 to 8 feeds before milk replacer is started but any you can get into the lamb (even as little as 30ml) will help.

Bottle-feeding has to be learned by the lamb. The greatest success in teaching lambs to drink will be obtained by commencing 6 – 12 hours after the lambs have finished their colostrum or been removed from their mum. Small weak lambs will need feeding sooner and more often.

To teach the lamb to drink, place the teat in its mouth and move the jaw by hand to stimulate sucking. If this does not work or there is a poor suck reflex the lamb can be fed using a stomach tube and bottle (available from clinic). Care is required and you should discuss this with a vet or experienced person before trying this or drowning may result.

Do not overfeed. It is best to keep lambs a little hungry especially in the first few days. Overfeeding can lead to scours or milk bloat.

As the lamb gets older, feeding can become less frequent and after three to four weeks of age they can be down to 2 big (500ml) feeds a day. Follow the instructions on the milk replacer. Changes in feeding frequency should be gradual.

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Special teats are recommended (available at clinic). Careful measuring of powder and water volumes is required to ensure the milk clots in the lambs stomach. Diluted milk is not a good thing. A whisk is best to mix it with and use warm water. Watch the water temperature to avoid scalding. Always clean around the lambs mouth with a damp cloth to prevent milk scald after feeding milk powder.

Milk replacers are not all created equal. You need a specific lamb milk replacer for at least the first 3 weeks of life. We recommend and stock **Anlamb** as this is the best quality available. Calf milk replacers are much weaker and have different proportions of ingredients. A common cause of poor or scouring lambs we see is the wrong milk powder being used. Follow the feeding directions closely on the milk powder you use. Do not change milk replacer or if absolutely necessary, do so carefully as this can cause scours.

Cleanliness is very important. Ensure teats, bottles and utensils are kept very clean and washed after every feed.

Water should be available to lambs at all times and be clean and fresh.

Quality hay or pasture should be readily available from one week of age.

Weaning can begin at any stage from about 5 weeks with milk feeds being reduced and then stopped. At this stage good water and pasture are very important.



Grooming Brushing and Washing - we are often asked about this and there are a few points to remember. You should not shampoo the lamb or use anything on the fleece at all. Hosing with straight water and brushing with a comb or stiff brush are all that is required. Rain does a great job!

Shelter, Pens, fences and collars – Lambs should have shelter available, from wind especially, at all times. It is important that lambs are well restrained or penned to ensure they don't stray or become prey to dogs etc. A few waratahs (fencing standards) and some netting are usually best, or a good collar and rope can be used. Lambs are very good at getting away so good knots are advised! Stake them to the ground or attach them to a running wire. A swivel is important to prevent strangulation.

Vaccination, Docking and Drenching – these are important to protect the lamb from diseases and must be done at the right time to be effective.

Vaccination is important to protect lambs from tetanus and pulpy kidney (a bacterial disease causing death). If the lamb's mother was vaccinated before lambing and the lamb got colostrum then vaccination is not necessary until the lamb is 3 months of age. If the ewe was not vaccinated before lambing then the lamb will need vaccinating at docking with **Lamb Vaccine**. It needs to be given to all lambs that do not get adequate colostrum as soon as possible after birth.

It is a simple injection that can be purchased from the clinic or given by a vet at the clinic. It is a 2 ml dose under the skin in the neck. A booster dose is advised 3-4 weeks later to give good immunity.

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Docking this involves using a rubber ring to remove the tail. It is normally done at 7 – 21 days of age (earlier is better) to protect the animal in later life from flystrike. The ring is applied 2 – 5 cm from the tail base. Rubber rings can also be used to castrate lambs at the same time as docking. Place the ring just above testicles ensuring you get both testicles below the ring. Ask for help from a farmer or we can do this at the clinic if you are unsure. Remember to vaccinate at the same time.

Drenching is important to protect the lamb from worms. This is normally done first at weaning and then every 4 – 6 weeks depending on the product used. We recommend First Drench as it kills all types of worms the lamb is likely to have as well as giving them a trace element boost. Dose is based on the lamb's body weight.



Common Diseases and how to treat and prevent them.

Scours – This is the most common problem we see and usually means either a colostrum deficiency or something has gone wrong with the feeding. You need to stop feeding the lamb milk and feed it electrolytes for 24 hours.

These are a special combination of salts and sugars that replace those lost in the diarrhoea. Some are available that will also feed the lamb.

Electrolytes should be fed instead of milk until the scour disappears then milk can be reintroduced. You should give small feeds of milk often (100 ml up to 6 times daily to start with before getting back into the normal routine. We recommend **Diarrest** electrolyte, which is available from the clinic in sachets. Do not mix milk and electrolytes together as this will not form a curd in the stomach and the scour will return. Occasionally lambs will need antibiotics to treat any secondary infections. These can be added to the milk or injected. You need to talk to a vet before using these.

Navel-ill / Joint-ill – These two conditions result from bacteria getting into the navel and infecting it or the joints. They are most common in lambs that have not had enough colostrum. The best way to prevent this is by spraying the navel of any orphan lambs you get with iodine. Treatment is with antibiotics which you also need to discuss with your vet.

Eyes – Two conditions are commonly seen in lambs eyes. The first is apparent from birth and usually affects both eyes. It is called entropion and is where the bottom eyelid folds into the eye irritating it. This can usually be fixed by simply folding the eyelid out and stretching it.

The other condition we see is conjunctivitis, again most common when insufficient colostrum has been fed. The eye appears red and there is usually a discharge. Clean the crust away and wipe with slightly salty water and keep clean. Antibiotics may be necessary if the problem persists.

If you have any questions or need help with anything please ask us. There is usually an easy solution.