

One Born Every Minute - Lambing

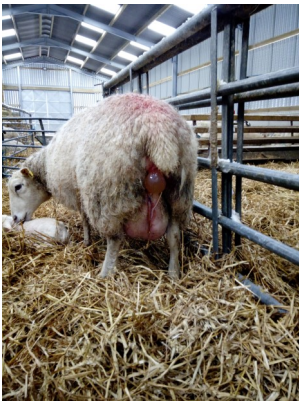
Practical Guide

Regardless of the scale of your enterprise, lambing is one of the most important times of the year for sheep breeders.

What do we need to look at?

The signs...

Signs of lambing may be present for some time before the actual process takes place, this includes restlessness, pawing at the ground and ewes separating themselves from the group. The average birthing time is 30 minutes.



Firstly the water bag appears and either hangs from the vulva or bursts. Most ewes will lamb within an hour of their water breaking, therefore ewes must be checked at least once per hour. Any ewe that has not made progress within 30 minutes after her water has broken should be laid down and checked. The lamb appears after the water bag, front feet first and then the rest of the body. Any ewe with parts of the lamb visible should also be checked unless rapid progress is made.

Our Practical Guide covers these useful topics:

1. Signs of normal lambing.
2. When to interfere.
3. What you need.
4. Examining a lambing ewe.
5. Malpresentations.
6. When to call the vet.
7. Post-partum care.
8. Colostrum
9. Care of the neonatal lamb.

www.fas.scot

Facebook.com/FASScot
Twitter.com/FASScot



When to interfere?

- If only the head appears
- The water bag has been passed and no progress is made in 30 minutes.
- When the lambing time takes more than 90 minutes.
- When only one leg, tail or the head can be seen.



Lambing Kit

- Clean hands!
- Clean, waterproof clothing, arm-length plastic gloves
- Plenty of sterile lubricant gel
- Lambing ropes
- Halter or helper for restraint of ewe
- Medicines – discuss with your vet
- Thermometer
- Stomach Tube
- Colostrum (frozen/powdered)
- Rubber Rings & Applicator
- Stock marker
- Plastic lamb jackets

Examining a Lambing Ewe

1. External

You will get a lot of information from what you can (or can't) see on the outside of the ewe. What is visible?

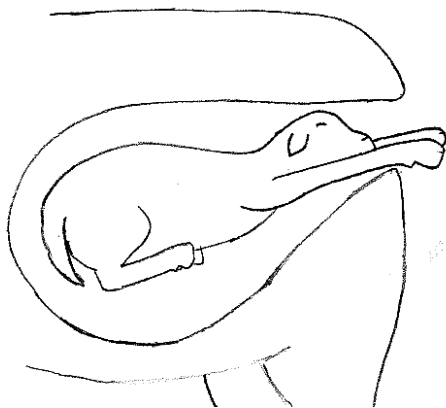
- Head
- Leg(s)
- Water bag
- Discharge
- Blood

Do not break the bag if it is intact until you have established what is going on.

One Born Every Minute - Lambing

Examining a Lambing Ewe Continued...

2. Internal



- Can you feel a lamb?

Feel inside the vagina to establish presence of lamb. Feel also for how lubricated it is. Dryness may indicate the ewe has been trying to lamb for a long time.

- Is the cervix open?

The ewe may not be ready or there could be an issue such as ring womb. If in doubt give another 30 minutes and re-check.

- Front Leg vs Back Leg?

You can tell the front legs from the back legs by the way they bend. The front leg joints bend the same way (forms a U-shape). The back leg joints flex in opposite directions (forming a Z-shape). Look at front and hind legs on a live lamb until you are confident in the difference.

- Do all legs belong to the same lamb?

Follow one leg up inside along the body and attempt to continue to follow to determine whether the legs present are from the same lamb.

- Is the lamb alive?

If you can locate the lambs mouth, gently use your finger to see if the lamb suckles on it. If the head is out gently tap on the outside of the eye and life will be indicated by blinking. Gently pulling on a limb and being met with a slight pull back from the lamb is also a sign of life.

- How do you deliver a lamb that needs a bit of help?

If the lamb is in the correct position (head and feet first) but the ewe is taking a long time to deliver, pull on front two legs in an arched direction out from the ewe and round to her hind legs.

Presentation

1. Backwards (posterior) presentation

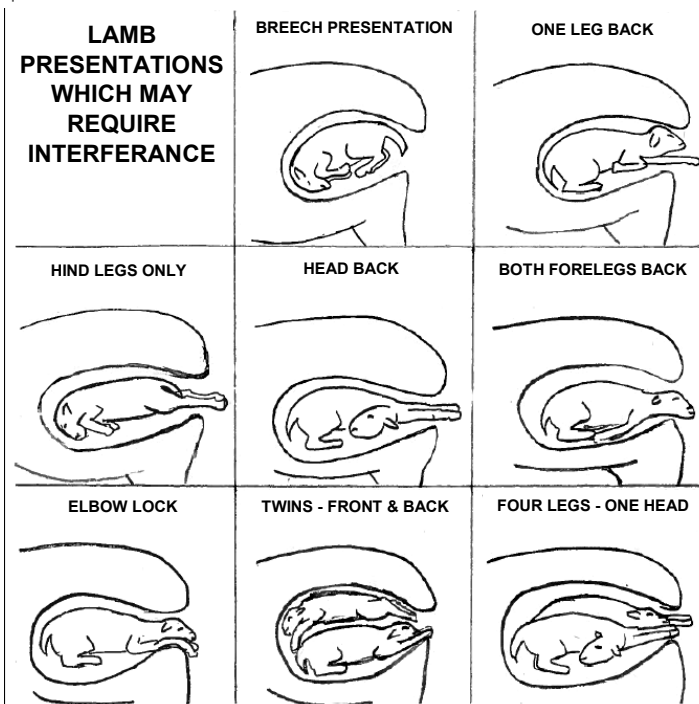
Do not attempt to turn the lamb. Most lambs can be delivered with adequate lubrication. Pull straight out until stifle is out then pull in an arc. If the lamb is also upside down then deliver the lamb straight out rather than in an arch. It is important to remember that the lamb will start to breathe once the cord is broken or pinched, so when delivering in this position try to be quick and confident.

2. Head back

Front legs are present, but no head is obvious. Trace limbs to neck, and follow neck to detect head. The head can then be straightened. If the head has been in this position for a while it may be difficult to keep straight so using a snare or rope in this situation is very helpful.

3. Leg back

In older ewes or when the lamb is small birth can take place with one leg back but the majority need correcting. The leg that has appeared should be traced back to the head and then followed to locate the other leg. It may be possible to straighten this leg easily, however the lamb may need pushed back in to create more room. Once the lamb is in the leg can be straightened. Tip: Put a rope on the head to reduce risk of losing it when the head is pushed back.



4. Head First (no legs)

The head may be swollen and this makes it difficult to correct. Use a rope around the head and apply lots of lubrication around the head and inside behind the head and around the body if able to (the long tube on the lubricant bottle is helpful for this). Use firm, steady pressure to push the head back in to allow you to then locate the legs and get them out. Having gravity on your side can help you in this case so if available use a helper to support the ewe in an upended position. Often just as you think it won't go back in, you are rewarded!

One Born Every Minute - Lambing

Presentation Continued...

5. Breech

The lamb is coming bottom first and no feet are seen/felt. Sometimes the tail can be seen. The back legs must be carefully straightened and the lamb may need to be pushed further in to do this. The feet should be cupped in your hand to prevent damage to the womb.

6. Simultaneous presentation

Carefully identify the limbs and head of one lamb and correct any malpresentation. It is usually easiest to deliver foetus closest to vagina first.

Most importantly, if you are struggling, in doubt or do not feel comfortable, phone your vet as they can always advise or come and intervene.



A lamb in distress may pass the meconium before birth, staining the fluids yellow.

When to call the Vet

Whilst many experienced shepherds know what they are doing there are certain situations where a vet is required:

- **No lamb**

The ewe is showing signs of labour but you cannot feel a lamb.

- **No open cervix**

Cervix is not opening and therefore the ewe cannot lamb.

- **Prolapse—before or after lambing**

Whilst it is possible for the shepherd to correct a prolapsed vagina, your vet can administer an epidural anaesthetic which will provide pain relief and stop straining. Antibiotics and anti-inflammatories are essential.

- **Metabolic disease**

The ewe may appear sick and not want to get up either before or after lambing. She may have other symptoms such as loss of appetite or a tremor. This could be a metabolic disease such as lambing sickness or twin lamb disease.

- **No confidence**

If you are not confident in carrying out a successful lambing phone the vet for advice or to come out and help.



© Barony College 2009

Post-partum Care

- Monitor the ewe closely to see if a second lamb is present. If ewes are scanned this will give an indication of how many lambs are to be expected.
- Navel dip the lamb with iodine to minimise infection. Use a dip, not a spray, as this gives better coverage. Iodine acts as a disinfectant as well as drying out the cord.
- Always check for injury to the ewe e.g. bleeding
- Check ewe for colostrum or evidence of mastitis.
- Monitor lamb suckling. If the lamb is reluctant or the ewe is displaying some mis-mothering then assisted feeding may be needed
- Medicines for ewe if required—ask vet advice

Management tips

- Using stock marker, spray the same number on both the ewe and her lamb(s). This will enable you to make sure they don't get split up from each other.
- Use rubber rings to castrate and dock lambs tails—these are used to avoid welfare problems linked to dirty tails and fly strike. These legally need to be applied within the first week of life.
- For weak, immobile lambs attempt to heat them up in a lamb warming box under a lamp. Ensure they have had colostrum
- Scan ewes prior to lambing and then group and feed ewes according to number of lambs expected

One Born Every Minute - Lambing

Colostrum

Colostrum is key to providing a kick start to every lambs' immune system. It is also a super food which provides energy and nutrients, helps to maintain body temperature, as well as being a laxative cleaning out the digestive tract of the new born lamb. At birth, lambs do not have antibodies, because the antibodies in the ewe's blood stream do not cross the placenta—colostrum provides these.

Most lambs will suckle without assistance, but this must be monitored to ensure adequate amounts are being ingested. After lambing it is a good idea to pull a little fluid from the teat, to check for the quality and quantity of colostrum. This also gives you the added benefit of removing the wax plug from the teat.

It is a good idea to harvest colostrum from ewes with singles, ewes which have lost lambs, or those which are not allowing lambs to suckle. Make sure that when milking the ewe, gloves are worn and the colostrum is collected into a **clean** bucket. It is best to obtain the colostrum within the first 8 hours after birth as quality starts to decrease. Colostrum can be kept in the fridge

for a week or in the freezer for a year. Store in small batches (100mls) so that it is easily defrosted. Do not use a microwave but instead heat through gently in warm water (no hotter than 50°C) (Wood Veterinary Group, 2017).



Key Rules

- The 3 Q's – Quality, Quantity, Quickly
- 50ml/kg of liveweight in the first few hours
- 200ml/kg of liveweight in the first 24 hours
- If not adequate supply, quality or quantity substitute with other ewes colostrum or powder.
- Beware when defrosting or heating colostrum supplies not to denature protein. If too hot for your hands then that is too hot for colostrum.

(Kirsten Williams, SAC Consulting)

Neonatal Lamb Care

Great care and attention is required in the first few hours of birth. It is important to monitor new born lambs to observe if they get up and suckle their mother. This should happen within the first hour although monitor:

- Big singles or lambs that needed help lambing
- 'Hung' lambs with swollen tongues
- Lambs that have been mixed up/mis-mothered.
- Triplet lambs
- Lambs from a ewe that is/was sick from 'twin lambs disease/difficult lambing etc.
- Lambs from ewes with big teats or no milk/one quartered.
- Lambs with 'rye' or twisted neck.

One of the greatest threats to new born lambs is hypothermia. Although we think of hypothermia as a condition caused by cold temperature or wind chill, it can also be caused by starvation and this can happen in ANY environmental conditions. It is important

therefore to monitor lamb colostrum and milk intake to ensure they do not suffer.

You can check if a lamb has suckled by placing your hand over it's spine and using your fingers and thumb to feel how full or hollow it's stomach is. If the lamb hasn't fed it will be very hollow. It's a good idea to do this twice a day for the first 36—48 hours after birth - it will allow you to pick up problems quickly, for instance a ewe developing mastitis or not allowing a lamb to suckle. You can also check the ewe—if a lamb has suckled her the teat will be clean and the udder soft. If you do these checks regularly you'll soon become confident in assessing if a lamb has suckled. In group pens when it's difficult to handle lambs regularly a useful tip is to watch the lambs as they wake—a well fed lamb will normally have a good stretch!



**Farm
Advisory
Service**

For more Practical Guides and advice visit
www.fas.scot

[Facebook.com/FASScot](https://www.facebook.com/FASScot)

[Twitter.com/FASScot](https://twitter.com/FASScot)