



FACT SHEET

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REVIVING NEWBORN LAMBS

An injection of dextrose can be a life-saver for cold or weak lambs. This factsheet outlines how to do it, and suggests a kit to keep handy during lambing to help you give your lambs the best possible chance of survival.

INJECT DEXTROSE MIX INTO THE ABDOMEN TO REVIVE STARVING AND HYPOTHERMIC LAMBS

Lambs born during a heavy cold snap can exhaust their energy stores just trying to keep warm. Too weak to feed off their mother, they will starve and die. Injecting a 20% mix of dextrose directly into the lamb's abdomen can give them the energy boost they need to survive. This technique is known as an intra-peritoneal injection. It can be done by the farmer, on the spot, and gives good results.

WHEN TO INJECT LAMBS

Inject lambs with dextrose who are too cold or weak to feed off their mother. You must do this before you warm the lamb. If you warm the lamb before you 'fuel' it, you will hasten its death.

Give the injection when the lamb is over four or five hours old. Lambs younger than this should still have enough energy stores to recover when warmed. It is not a disadvantage to inject very new lambs. It is just that warming them should be enough.

INJECT LAMBS

- Who have not fed since birth
- Who are cold and weak
- Before warming them

WHAT TO DO

- Inject sterile 20% dextrose mix directly into the lamb's abdomen. 20% dextrose is not available to purchase - your vet should be able to supply 40% dextrose already diluted with sterile water or saline solution. Ideally, it will come in a 500 ml flexibag with attached draw-off tube. Alternatively, you can purchase 40% dextrose from your vet or rural merchant and dilute it yourself with sterile saline or cooled boiled water. Mix 50:50 with saline/boiled water.

Diluted solution may have a shorter shelf-life, so discard any unused at the end of the season.

- Connect a 5ml or 10ml vaccinating gun to the draw-off tube or extract the dextrose using a 60ml syringe.
- Use a 10mm 18G vaccinating needle. It must not be longer than 12.5mm.
- The dosage rate is 10ml of dextrose per kilo of lamb weight. The most susceptible are small newborn lambs that weigh less than 4kg, so you should inject 40ml.
- Warm dextrose is preferable—however it still works if you don't.
- Hold the lamb between your legs or lie it on the ground.
- Spray the area to be injected with iodine.
- Push the needle in just in front of the navel (ie. on the head side) pushing in at a slight angle towards the chest. You may feel a popping sensation as the needle pierces the abdomen.
- Inject the solution.
- If you see a swelling occurring under the skin, the needle is not in far enough.



The injection directly into the abdomen with 20% dextrose gives the best results as it works more quickly, and is faster to do. However another option to get energy into the lamb is to inject dextrose saline under the skin—known as a subcutaneous injection.

- Prepare a vaccinating needle or syringe with dextrose saline (note, this is not the same as 20% dextrose).
- Inject 30ml/kg of lamb weight subcutaneously around the ribs, on both sides of the lamb, and rub.

LAMBING KIT

At lambing time, it is helpful to have everything you need in one spot. Use a waterproof backpack or container (like a fishing tackle box) to hold all the necessary lambing equipment and keep it clean and dry. Backpacks are useful to keep hands free when walking hills and catching lambs and ewes.

THINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR KIT:

- 20% dextrose mix in a flexi bag with a tube attachment
- Vaccinating gun with a box of sterile 3/8 inch needles and spare box for dirty needles or, if preferred, a syringe with a 3/8 inch needle
- Thermos or bowl to warm dextrose (optional)
- Iodine spray to sterilise abdomen
- Towel to dry off lamb
- Lamb covers (eg, Lamdry, Woolover). These are typically three to four dollars each (2012 prices) and stay on the lamb until tailing
- Antibiotic injection for ewes with birthing difficulties (in consultation with your veterinarian)
- Bearing equipment which may include: baling twine, needle and string or plastic bearing retainer
- Oral energy drench for 'downer' ewes after a difficult labour
- Hand disinfectant for lambing ewes
- Synthetic gloves to help birthing
- Veterinary lube
- Marker chalk or raddle to identify ewes and lambs that have had treatment

WHAT FOLLOW-UP IS REQUIRED?

After giving the lamb dextrose and warming it up, it should become more active and ready to feed. Place back with the ewe if she is happy to take it. However, keep an eye on it—it may become an orphan lamb.

A lamb cover can also help improve the lamb's chances of survival.

Since the procedure is unlikely to be carried out under sterile conditions, a preventative dose of penicillin would be advisable.

MORE INFORMATION

This factsheet was produced by Beef + Lamb New Zealand using information from Clutha Vets. Lynley Wyeth added useful comments.

Find out more about raising orphan lambs:

- FS80—Artificial lamb rearing—managing abomasal bloat

Find out more about maximising lamb survival:

- FS161—Tips for managing ewes with triplets

For copies of any of these documents, contact Beef + Lamb New Zealand: email resources@beeflambnz.com, freephone 0800 BEEFLAMB (0800 233 352) or visit www.beeflambnz.com

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