



MARCHES VETS FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2016

Joint Ill in Lambs

Almost all cases of joint ill in young lambs are caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus dysgalactiae*. Many ewes carry this infection either on the skin or in the vagina, so lambs can become infected during birth. Infection can gain entry to the lamb through the tonsils or the navel. However, many cases of joint ill happen when the lamb is a number of days, if not weeks old. In these cases, the infection is likely to have gained entry by a different route and two common ones are through **ear tags** or from elastrator **rings**. You can reduce the risks from tagging by wiping the ear and the tag with surgical spirit before you apply the tags. But it's more difficult to prevent infection from ringing. Antibiotics given at the time of ringing are generally not the solution as it is only when the ring starts to break the skin that the infection gets in. When treating joint ill, the most important thing is to treat early. Lambs like the one here with multiple distended joints are unlikely to respond to treatment. *Strep. dysgalactiae* is sensitive to penicillins and these remain the best antibiotics for treatment, along with an anti-inflammatory to reduce the pain.



Nematodirus in Lambs

For *Nematodirus battus* worms, hatching of most eggs requires a prolonged period of chilling followed by a mean day/night temperature of more than 10°C. So, this spell of night frosts may well trigger hatching of eggs on pasture when the weather warms up. The **Nematodirus forecast** on the SCOPS website has been improved this year, and will be updated daily. See <http://www.scops.org.uk/nematodirus-forecast.html>. However, lambs will only be at risk from Nematodirus if they are eating grass and if they are on ground grazed by young lambs last year. So you can minimize the risk by grazing ewes and young lambs on ground that carried cattle last year, or that was shut up to mow and not grazed last spring, or new leys. The signs of Nematodirus are scouring and possibly death. **Coccidiosis** will cause similar signs, and it isn't always possible to differentiate the two diseases from a faeces sample. This is because both parasites can cause severe disease before eggs appear in the faeces. But both diseases can be confirmed straight away from a post mortem examination.

With coccidiosis, pastures can remain infected from the previous year's lambs, but can also become infective from this year's lambs. Always turning lambs out onto the same fields, then moving them on, risks causing coccidiosis in the later lambs. This is because the older lambs contaminate the fields for the younger lambs that follow. Keeping lambs inside for more than a week also increases the risk of coccidiosis.

With both diseases, it's best to treat lambs after they've picked up the infections, but **before they are showing obvious clinical signs**. But it's difficult to know when this is! At this point in time, the nights are too cold for Nematodirus eggs to have hatched, so the only risk is from coccidiosis. Where there is a known risk of coccidiosis, we would normally recommend to treat lambs from 4 to 5 weeks of age. Treating too young is a waste of time. The options for treatment are Vecoxan and Baycox drenches. Baycox has greater persistency in the lamb than Vecoxan, so generally only needs to be given once, where treatment with Vecoxan often needs repeating.

White drenches or goup 1-BZ wormers are still recommended for treating Nematodirus early in the year. However, occasional cases of resistance to white drenches have been reported. It's good practice to collect samples for a worm egg count 10 days after treatment to check that the worms have been effectively killed.

Worming Ewes at Lambing Time

Should you or shouldn't you? This is an area where ideas have changed and **current advice is only to treat thin ewes** and leave the majority untreated. This is to avoid selecting for resistant worms.

How about for Liver Fluke? If you know that you have fluke habitat on the farm, it's best to check to see if ewes are infected. You should do this whether or not you have treated the ewes earlier in the winter. If you have treated, checking will confirm whether they need treating again and if you haven't treated, you'll know if they need treating. Most fluke are likely to be adult fluke at this time of year, so checking the faeces for liver fluke eggs is the easiest way to identify if fluke are present. This can be done on a pooled faeces sample – just collect a total of more than 40g from as many piles of fresh faeces as possible and bring to the surgery for us to send off.

Back to worming ewes and to some new findings. Using **moxidectin 2% injection (Cydectin LA) for ewes at lambing is bad news!** It's been shown that the ewes excrete the moxidectin in milk. This might sound as a good thing as it will reduce worm burdens in young lambs. But it provides a sublethal dose to the worms in the lambs, so selects strongly for resistant worms. What will happen is that the lambs will do well whilst they are on the ewes, but later in the season they will have poor immunity to worms and may well not thrive. And if you then worm the lambs with moxidectin drench, it's unlikely to be very effective. Once you have moxidectin resistant worms on the farm, moxidectin won't be fully effective against worms again. And nor will ivermectin or doramectin (Dectomax).

Preventing Calf Scour

The newborn calf has no protection against the bugs it will meet shortly after birth. So, it's important to

- minimise exposure to infection by making sure the calf is born into a **clean environment**,
- maximise the calf's ability to fight any infections by ensuring it has an **early feed of colostrum** with plenty of antibodies



If colostrum is contaminated by bacteria, the antibodies are less well absorbed by the calf. So, if a calf's first feed is from dirty teats, this will reduce the protection it gets. And if you are collecting surplus colostrum to store for future use, be sure to clean off the udder and to freeze the colostrum as soon as possible. If colostrum is stored at room temperature for more than a few hours, the bacteria in it will multiply rapidly.

Keeping dry cows in a well bedded yard so that they stay clean is vital to maximise the survival of newborn calves.