

Lambing essentials and facts



The lambing toolkit should be well stocked and all equipment kept in clean order for a successful lambing. Key items of kit are: lubricant, disposable gloves, lambing ropes, iodine, disinfectant, spray markers, infrared lamps, disinfectant, electrolytes, a warming box, colostrum and milk powder, feeding tubes, feeding teats and bottles, bottle sterilising kit, and prolapse harnesses.



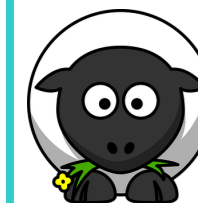
For lambing indoors, ample clean and fresh straw is required, and pens to fasten up ewes and their new lambs – this avoids any confusion about who belongs to who, aids bonding between ewe and lambs, and helps you notice if anyone isn't feeding or looking under the weather.



85% of the lamb's growth takes place in the final two months of pregnancy, so farmers must adapt feeding rations accordingly – it's a fine balance between making sure the ewes have enough nutrition to be healthy enough for birth, and lambs that are too large to be born without intervention



Lambing can take place indoors or outdoors – indoor lambing tends to be for those born between January and March, with lambing outdoors common towards the middle of March and into April



It is critical that lambs have enough colostrum within the first 18-24 hours of life, as close to birth as possible and certainly they should have as much as possible within six hours of being born – this provides essential antibodies from the mother's milk and without it, lambs will rarely survive. Most farmers keep a supply of colostrum in the freezer – milking it off a ewe that has lost her own lambs, for example. Artificial colostrum can also be bought





Most ewes will have two lambs, but it isn't uncommon for larger numbers, one local farmer had five lambs this year!

Lambing – stages of birth



One of the first signs is a sheep sitting away from the flock on their own, or wandering around a bit aimlessly. They also often sit and lick their lips, and if another ewe has lambed nearby, they will be very interested in those lambs and often try to pinch them! The ewe will paw at the ground, trying to make a 'nest', often bleating at no one in particular, in the same way as they would make bleating noises to the lambs when they are born.



A sure sign that birth is imminent is the appearance of one or more 'water bags', these are the membranes containing the fluid that has surrounded the lambs during pregnancy – these bags will usually burst as the ewe gets up and down as she is restless during labour.



If the lamb is in the correct position being born, the tips of two feet will appear, with a little nose sat directly above. In this situation, unless the lamb is very large, the ewe will push the lamb out. Sometimes the ewe will stand up as the lamb is half way out and it will fall out to the floor – the lamb is not hurt and this is nature's way of shocking the lamb in to breathing.



At this point the farmer will check the lamb is breathing, that there is no fluid in its airways, and no remnants of the membrane sack over its nose. If the ewe is expecting another lamb, that should follow in the next 5-10 minutes.





Sometimes the farmer will need to intervene if the ewe is seen to be pushing but no lamb appears, or if she is making no effort to push. Both signs indicate a lamb is either presented incorrectly (it is coming backwards, or has a leg 'back' – not pointing the right way) or it has perhaps grown too much and the ewe needs some assistance in pulling the lamb out. If a farmer has to intervene, the lambs are often born in yellow fluid, which indicates the lambs have had a poo caused by stress, this means the farmer was right to intervene. The ewe will lick the lambs clean and dry – an essential part of their bonding.



Once the lamb or lambs have been born, the ewe will pass the placenta or 'afterbirth' – it may seem gross but the ewe will eat this as it is full of essential nutrients. It is also the mother's nature to protect her young, as foxes and other predators would smell the afterbirth. The mothers do this even if they are tucked up warm in a nice shed with no likelihood of a fox making an appearance!



Lambs will usually try to get up within minutes of being born and make their way to the ewe's udder and her essential colostrum, which they must drink within six hours of being born.



The farmer will usually pen the ewe and her lambs up, this helps to aid bonding and ensures there is no confusion about who belongs to who. When the lambs are dry, the farmers will use a special spray paint to mark numbers on the ewe and her lambs, when they are turned out to the fields after 24hrs this means that the farmer knows which lamb belongs with who!

