



By **Harriet Fuller**
Pre-lambing Veterinary and Medicine

Ewes that have already had a primary vaccination course against clostridial diseases will require a booster pre-lambing.

The advice on the data sheets for when to give the pre-lambing booster differ slightly:

Bravoxin 10 – between eight and two weeks prior to lambing

Heptavac P Plus – between six and four weeks pre-lambing

The narrow 'window' for Heptavac P Plus means that ewes are best grouped according to lambing dates (raddle marks) and given their booster at the correct time. If given the booster too long before lambing, or too close to lambing, antibody levels in colostrum are likely to be lower.

Both vaccines need to be injected under the skin to be fully effective. The preferred site is high up the neck.

The differences between the two vaccines are:

Bravoxin 10 provides cover against *Clostridium sordellii*, whilst Heptavac P Plus does not

Heptavac P Plus protects against pastuerella, Bravoxin 10 does not

Condition score ewes at the time of vaccination. Separate any thin ones for preferential feeding.

Blood sampling ewes three to four weeks pre-lambing can be useful in prolific flocks to check that the ewes' energy and protein needs are being met. Your vet would usually sample six to ten ewes per group (eg six twin bearing ewes, six twin bearing yearlings etc). The results will help identify if the diet is meeting the ewes' needs. If not, there is time for changes to be made that should help to ensure good lamb birthweights and a plentiful supply of quality colostrum.

Twin lamb disease results from the ewe trying to mobilise too much of her own body fat to provide energy to the foetus. This can happen because her diet doesn't contain enough energy to meet her needs, because she is not getting her share of the ration, or because she does not want to eat enough (eg unpalatable silage or overfat ewes). The demands on ewes carrying twins or triplets in late pregnancy are high and many will literally be on a 'knife edge' – any stress can then precipitate twin lamb disease or hypocalcaemia.

Vaginal prolapses usually happen in ewes carrying two or more lambs. There are various theories as to why they happen, but current thinking is that excess internal fat is one of the main contributory factors. So, ewes that have been overfat in mid-pregnancy are particularly at risk. When trying to reduce the incidence of prolapses in a flock, the following will all help:

- Identify ewes that prolapse and CULL
- Monitor BCS throughout the year to avoid ewes getting too fat at any stage
- Encourage ewes in late pregnancy to move around – eg let out into a yard, delay housing etc

Treating prolapses – the most important thing is to act as soon as the prolapse is noticed. The longer a prolapse is left, the more damage to the soft tissues, so the more the ewe is likely to keep straining after the prolapse has been replaced. Clean the prolapse with warm water with a mild antiseptic solution (eg Hibiscrub). Gently push it back in – if it won't go easily, the ewe will need vet attention and an epidural injection. Apply a harness. Ewes should never be stitched without an epidural – and most vets now prefer to use a harness rather than stitching. Some harnesses come with a plastic spoon – throw it in the recycling bin! The spoons act as a route for infection and are also likely to make the ewe keep straining. All prolapse cases should receive an injection of antibiotic and an anti-inflammatory.

Worming Ewes Pre-lambing

Around lambing, ewes carrying multiple foetuses often struggle to maintain immunity to worms. This is because the production of antibodies requires protein and the demands for protein for foetal growth and colostrum/milk production mean there is not enough protein available to maintain antibody levels. It is possible to feed ewes enough protein to maintain their antibody levels, but they need more protein than currently accepted levels.

So, this means that most ewes carrying multiple foetuses will pass out significant numbers of worm eggs in the last few weeks of gestation and during the first four to six weeks of lactation. Fit ewes carrying single lambs have fewer demands and are generally able to maintain their immunity to worms.

So, ewes carrying multiple foetuses are generally best wormed around lambing to avoid them contaminating the pasture and increasing the worm challenge to their lambs. The ideal timing for worming and the product to be used should be discussed each year with your vet.

Liver Fluke

If you know that your farm carries liver fluke, you will probably already have treated your ewes in the autumn. Whether or not the ewes will need treating again at housing or at lambing will depend on

- The time of year of housing and/or lambing
- Where they have grazed and what the weather has been like since the previous fluke treatment and
- What was used to treat them the last time

There is no blueprint for controlling liver fluke that will fit your farm each year and definitely not one that will fit every farm. Liver fluke monitoring and control needs to be discussed and reviewed with your vet on a regular basis.

Abortions

If more than 2% of ewes have aborted, or if several ewes abort in one day, it is likely that there is an infectious cause. The most commonly diagnosed causes of abortion in ewes in the UK are Enzootic Abortion and toxoplasmosis. There are effective vaccines against both these diseases, so it is frustrating to vets that these diseases remain so common.

It is always wise to treat every abortion as though it may be infectious to other ewes and infectious to people. Wear gloves to handle the ewe and any aborted material. Isolate the ewe from other ewes yet to lamb and remove all the products of abortion and any contaminated bedding. Aborted lambs and placenta should be placed in a bag ready for sampling at the local vet practice or lab. Those not being used for investigation should be sent as fallen stock or incinerated. Do not leave around for dogs or wildlife to scavenge. Pregnant women should avoid contact with ewes at or close to lambing because several of the causes of abortion in sheep are particularly dangerous to women during pregnancy.