



Lamb Action for Profit

Better Returns from Controlling Mastitis

Boost flock returns by reducing the impact of mastitis, such as increased **costs** and poor animal **health** and **welfare**.

- Udder condition is the most common reason for culling younger ewes (2-4 years old), which means that mastitis has a major role in reducing the productivity of ewes and increasing replacement costs.
- There are two forms of **mastitis** - acute and chronic - with acute mastitis affecting 4-5% of ewes in lowland flocks and 1-2% of ewes in hill flocks per year, and chronic mastitis affecting between 1-15% of the flock.

Targets

- Determine the number of ewes affected by mastitis each year.
- Establish which risk factors can be reduced on farm.
- Identify affected animals for culling using a permanent mark.

Management Guidelines

- Appreciate that mastitis is usually confined to one side of the udder as there is a good barrier dividing the left and right sides.
- Understand that infection occurs through the teat canal, and is usually caused by one of two bacteria (*Mannheimia haemolytica* from the throat of healthy lambs or *Staphylococcus aureus* from the skin of the ewe).
- Be aware that acute mastitis is usually seen in first week after lambing or more commonly at peak lactation, and can rapidly progress to the death of the ewe.
- Treat ewes with acute mastitis immediately to try and save them, however it is rare that the udder will function again.
- Know that for chronic mastitis a ewe may appear not to be ill and there may be barely detectable changes to the udder, and it can occur during lactation or at **weaning**.
- Realise that chronic mastitis may be detected at the pre-tupping check more easily than at weaning as the udder is not full of milk, and the affected udder may be enlarged, hard or lumpy.
- Be aware that if chronic mastitis is not detected until the following lambing then the affected, non-functioning side of the udder may be smaller and have a hard core of dry pus in the teat canal.
- Accept that even after a mild case of mastitis, where there is no loss of function, there will have been a reduction in milk flow that will lead to significant reductions in lamb **growth rates**.
- Keep clear **records** and use coloured ear tags to identify ewes that had mastitis so that they can be culled before the following tupping.

More detailed advice, costings, calculators and further information supporting these guidelines are available free of charge to levy payers in a unique interactive Lamb Action for Profit resource at www.eblex.org.uk



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Clinical signs for Acute Mastitis	Treatment for Acute Mastitis
High temperature, loss of appetite and looks depressed.	Ewe should be brought in and penned individually so that good care can be given to her and the lambs, and there is less spread of infection.
Altered gait (caused by painful udder).	
Stops the lambs suckling.	
Udder becomes hot, red and swollen and is extremely painful.	Veterinary advice should be sought and usually the recommended treatment is injectable antibiotic and an injectable anti-inflammatory drug.
No milk but a watery liquid that may contain pus or blood is produced.	
If the ewe survives, the udder becomes cold and clammy just before the dead tissue sloughs away.	

Risk Factors for Mastitis

Risk Factor	Prevention
<p>Dirty conditions due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faecal contamination of the udder High stocking density Wet muddy conditions 	Ensure conditions are clean and dry at lambing time.
<p>Damage to the skin of the udder due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teeth of lambs Orf lesions Dermatitis caused by Staphylococcal infection Fly worry 	<p>Avoid teat lesions. Consider vaccinating to prevent Orf infection.</p> <p>Ensure good fly control.</p>
<p>Chilling of udder due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shearing before turn-out Excessive crutching Short tail docking Lack of shelter Particularly rough or windy weather 	<p>Avoid turning ewes out if the weather is cold, wet and windy.</p> <p>Provide sufficient shelter for newly lambed ewes in case the weather deteriorates.</p>
<p>Bruising of the udder tissue by lambs, which is worse if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 or 3 lambs competing for teats Insufficient milk Ewe is in poor condition Insufficient creep feed for the lambs 	<p>Do not expect a ewe to rear triplets. Manage the nutrition of the ewes well. They should be at least condition score 3 (out of 5) and have sufficient protein in their diet to produce adequate milk for twins.</p>
<p>Too much milk for the needs of the lambs leading to back pressure in the teats.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May occur when there is a lot of grass and the lambs need less milk but the ewe is still producing a lot Breed susceptibility with milky ewes, such as mules, perhaps having a higher incidence than other breeds 	
<p>Poor weaning management that prevents rapid and complete drying-off of ewes.</p>	<p>Check your weaning policy. Both twins should be removed at the same time and ewes put onto a reduced diet away from sight and sound of the lambs.</p> <p>Under no circumstances should ewes be deprived of water.</p>

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