



Animal Production FACTSHEET

Hypothermia in Lambs

Introduction

Hypothermia in lambs means the animal's body temperature has dropped below normal. This condition can lead to delayed growth or death. Early detection and intervention can greatly increase a lamb's chances of survival. This factsheet describes some of the causes of hypothermia, how to detect it and how to successfully intervene. A related factsheet titled "Stomach Tubing Young Lambs" is also available.



Lambs at Risk

The lambs that are at the greatest risk of getting hypothermia include:

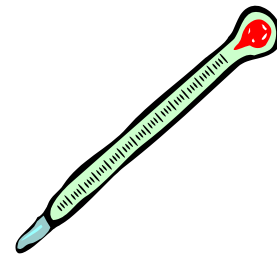
- lambs from ewes in poor condition
- lambs from very old or very young ewes
- twins and especially triplets
- small and premature lambs
- lambs which are limp or weak at birth

All these lambs need extra shelter and nourishment to survive.

Detection of Hypothermia

Take the lamb's temperature with a rectal thermometer. If the lamb's temperature is:

- 39 to 40 °C - the lamb is normal
- 37 to 39 °C - the lamb is at risk
- 37 °C or less - the lamb has hypothermia and is in danger of dying.



Times of High Risk

From birth to 6 hours of age - the wet newborn lamb loses heat very rapidly and can quickly become hypothermic. This is more likely to occur in cold, wet or windy conditions. Adequate colostrum and brown fat (a type of fat that the lamb is born with) help the lamb through this period by increasing heat production.

From 6 hours to 3 days after birth - starvation leads to a drop in heat production and the lamb becomes hypothermic. This can happen even in warm, sunny weather. All the lamb's brown fat has been used by this time and it needs an adequate, good quality milk intake to stay warm.



Copies of this and other publications may be obtained from the Department's Regional Offices, the factsheet author or by visiting our website at <http://www.gov.nl.ca/agric/>.



Hypothermic Lambs Need to be Resuscitated

1. To resuscitate the lamb:

- Dry the lamb with hay or paper towels. Dry lambs lose less heat.
- Warm the lamb. Place the lamb in warm air (e.g. from a space heater or car warmer at about 40-45 °C).
- Lambs, aged 6 hours or more, have a greater chance of recovery if they are given an injection of dextrose **before** they are warmed. 10 mg/kg of sterile 20% solution is given by intraperitoneal injection. Ask your Regional Veterinarian to show you how to do this, it is not a difficult technique. If the lamb is not given dextrose prior to warming, it may die as its temperature approaches normal due to low blood sugar levels.
- Recovery - when the lamb's rectal temperature has reached 38 °C, remove the lamb from the warm air. Most lambs will take 2-4 hours to warm but some may take longer.
- Do not attempt to warm them too quickly as you will send them into shock and they will die.

2. Care After Resuscitation

After resuscitation, feed the lamb by giving it 150-250 mls of colostrum by stomach tube (see factsheet "Stomach Tubing Young lambs").

Return the lamb to the ewe if the lamb can stand and suck vigorously. If the lamb is still weak, feed it by stomach tube with 50 mls/kg body weight three times daily.

Keep the lamb in a small pen at 20 °C and check its temperature regularly. If the temperature falls again, return it to the warm air.

More Information

Anyone wishing more information on hypothermia in lambs, or other animal health or husbandry practices can contact their Regional Veterinarian at the offices of the Department of Forest Resources and Agrifoods.

Further factsheets are also available through these offices or on our website.

Written by:

Dr. Douglas Tweedie
Regional Veterinarian
Animal Health Division
9 Kinsmen Drive
P. O. Box 640
Bishop's Falls, NL A0H 1C0
(709) 258-5334 phone
(709) 258-5873 fax
e-mail: dtweedie@gov.nl.ca

