

Ask A Vet: Vaccination Program Keeps Sheep Healthy

Sunday, October 4, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I am a new flock owner of some sheep and I want to get a good vaccination program in place. There seems to be a lot of opinions as to what or what not to do. Can you please shed some light on this?

-Faithful Reader

Dear Reader,

This is an excellent question and believe it or not, one we get asked about quite often even from experienced flock owners. This is one of the most important aspect of a good management program that is both inexpensive and critical to insure against diseases that affect lambs and sheep. We are going to break it down into prebreeding, prelambing, preweaning, weaning, and replacement ewes.

Prebreeding is the period of time vaccines are done six and three weeks before introducing the ram. Vibrio (campylobacter) is done and generally boosted in 60-90 days and can make them a little sore. Prelambing vaccinations are done three weeks prior to lambing. We recommend Clostridium perfringens C and D, tetanus and intranasal parainfluenza (Nasalgen) squirted 1 ml up one nostril. Preweaning is done at two to three weeks prior to weaning. We are using Clostridium perfringens C and D, and tetanus. At weaning, we are boosting the C and D and tetanus. Replacement ewes are done six weeks prior to breeding with Vibrio, 8-way Clostridial vaccines and Orf (contagious ecthyma) if is a problem. At the time of docking tails and castrating, lambs, they should be vaccinated for C and D and tetanus. If ewes were not vaccinated prior to lambing with tetanus, lambs should be given 300 IU of tetanus antitoxin as well as C and D. I always give antitoxin at this time.

Clostridial vaccines are protecting against enterotoxemia caused by Clostridium perfringens type C and D, and tetanus (lockjaw) caused by Clostridium tetani. Enterotoxemia causes bloody scours associated with type C and affects the small intestine and often seen in first few weeks after birth. This is an indigestion problem when stressed (losing a litter mate or changing from milk to creep feed). Type D is what we call "overeating disease" and hits them over a month of age and usually brought on by sudden changes in feed that causes an overgrowth of bacteria that can cause a toxic or harmful reaction in the intestine.

We often talk about passive immunity. This is where antibodies are passed from the mother to the baby in the colostrum or "first milk". If the babies get enough or consume enough colostrum, the maternal antibodies coming from mama will sustain the lamb for six to eight weeks after birth. Recommendation is that a lamb should receive about 10 percent of its body weight in colostrum. For example, a 10 pound lamb should therefore get one pound of colostrum or 16 ounces.

There are other diseases that can be given and it depends on overall health of flock when making that decision such as soremouth, footrot, or caseous lymphadenitis (CL). Your veterinarian can help you sort through this. Thanks for the great question.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz