

Updated Oct 2021

Basic Sheep Husbandry

Vaccination

The most common fatal diseases of sheep are the five clostridial diseases (pulpy kidney, tetanus, blackleg, black disease and malignant oedema). Cheesy gland is another disease that can cause significant economic losses while not usually fatal. To protect against these diseases' vaccination with *Glanvac® 6* is recommended.

Lambs should receive their first vaccination at lamb marking, with a second dose of vaccine 4-6 weeks apart, for example at weaning, then an annual booster thereafter. Ewes should receive their annual booster for ewes should be given 2-4 weeks before the start of lambing. Rams should be vaccinated 4 weeks prior to joining and wethers 4-6 weeks prior to shearing.

Drenching

To drench appropriately, it is recommended to weigh some of the sheep to set the appropriate dose for the heaviest in the mob. The most effective way to administer the drench is to tightly pack a race, to gently place a hand under the sheep's chin, insert the barrel of the drench gun into the side of the sheep's mouth, between the front teeth and the molars, sliding the barrel gently backwards over the tongue until the tip rests on the back of the tongue, before slowly pressing the plunger and delivering the full dose of drench.

Worms

Drenching for worms is important to prevent reduced growth rates, wool growth, weakness, scours, poor reductive performance and death. The WormBoss website provides information on effective drenches available.

To assess the efficacy of drenches and check for parasite burdens it is recommended to collect faecal samples for testing. Regular use of worm egg counts may reduce the need for drenching and help slow the onset of drench resistance.

For routine monitoring, collect fresh, uncontaminated samples directly from the ground by holding sheep in the corner of a pen or paddock for 10-15mins, then collect what is on the ground after they walk away. Store the samples in an airtight container and refrigerate until testing is performed.

Worm Egg Count Reduction Test (WECRT)

To check the efficacy of a drench, faecal samples are taken 10-14 days after treatment and worm egg counts are compared with either pre-drenching levels or an untreated control group.

Lamb marking

You should plan to mark lambs at 2-8 weeks of age (e.g. two weeks after the end of lambing).

It is important to maximise hygiene during lamb marking to prevent infection.

To achieve this:

- Avoid marking in hot, dust, wet or muddy conditions.
- Soak instruments in disinfectant at the start of the day, clean between each animal and disinfect at frequent intervals.

Ear tagging

It is recommended to perform ear tagging with flexible, plastic ear tags. Select a position midway between the ear so the tag hangs down the lower edge of the ear with the number facing forward.

All sheep must be tagged with a National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) ear tag before leaving their property of origin.

Castration

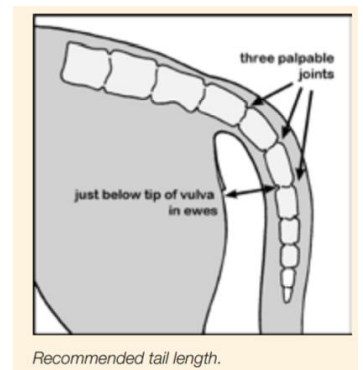
Castration is when the testicles are removed using lamb marking rings (preferred method). To perform, expand the ring on the applicator with the prongs pointing towards the lamb's body, pull the scrotum through the expanded ring, using light pressure push the testicles through the ring and into the scrotum then release the pressure on the applicator so the ring tightens around the scrotum.

Tail docking

Tail docking prevents the accumulation of faecal matter on the hind end of sheep and reduces the risk of flystrike. The tail should be docked through the third palpable joint space, or just below the tip of the vulva in ewes using lamb marking rings (preferred) or gas-heated tail docking knife.

To provide targeted pain relief to the lambs during these procedures, such as the use of lignocaine, meloxicam or utilisation of products such as the Numnuts® tool, is strongly recommended.

After the lamb marking procedures are completed, the lambs should be returned to their mothers asap to prevent mismothering.



If you are concerned about the health of your sheep, give us a call on (03) 5721 4000.

Handy resources:

<https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/animal-health-welfare-and-biosecurity/husbandry/>

<http://www.sheep101.info/201/>