

Bottle Lamb Care

Healthy Lamb Indicators

Temperature: 39-40°C	Firm, dark colored poop
Alert and Energetic	Bright eyes, perky ears
Warm mouth = warm, fed lamb	

Picking Out a Lamb

A lamb should receive colostrum for the first 24 hours of life.

Colostrum administration or feeding at birth is the single most critical feeding and management point in the lamb's entire life. After this 24 hour period, lambs should be well started on a bottle.

All lambs must be tagged before leaving their place of birth. Look for a small yellow Canadian Sheep Identification tag in the right ear.



If a wool breed, lambs typically have their tails banded (docked) and may be castrated. If a band was used, it may take four weeks or more to fall off. Lambs might also have been vaccinated which is good information to know as a booster shot may be required.

Pen

Lambs will do best in fresh air, with fellow sheep where possible. Provide an area of their pen with dry, clean bedding (straw, wood shavings, etc). In cold winter temperatures lambs will do best if in deep bedding that hides their legs when lying down.

Equipment Required

Bottle lambs can be fed using a free choice or limited feeding system.

Free Choice - Usually a bucket with teats is used with milk available 24/7. If feeding multiple lambs and consistent feeding times is an issue, a bucket can be a great alternative. This method is often used if feeding a larger number of lambs. An advantage is the reduced labour required. Disadvantages can include the milk freezing if not in a heated barn, and the risk of barn cats chewing nipples to access the milk.



Limit Feeding - A bottle and nipple available for each lamb at feedings. Often most practical when feeding a small number of lambs, milk is fed several times throughout the day. Advantages can be that lambs transition quickly to solid feed and are ready for early weaning. A disadvantage is that it is more labour intensive than offering milk free choice.



Milk Replacer

Milk replacer specifically made for lambs is available from many feed stores. Be sure to read the manufacturer instructions carefully. Clean equipment and consistent feeding times and temperature of the milk will greatly improve your success!

Tips for Success!

Lightly scratch around the lamb's tail to increase their desire to suck.

Never squeeze the bottle when the lamb is drinking.

Don't let the lamb suck air on an empty bottle.

Feed Requirements

From an early age, lambs should have access to fresh water, a highly palatable solid food (creep feed) and high quality hay. A week old is not too early to have solid feed and water accessible to a bottle lamb. There are many options of solid food to offer a lamb, from pelleted versions from your local feed store or mill, to a concoction of various feed grains such as soy, oats and barley. Initially, the protein content of the creep needs to be high (~18%) and as the lamb grows, that protein content can be decreased (~12%). Providing forage such as hay is important and often a green, leafy alfalfa is preferred to get the lamb rumen functioning. Replenishing hay, solid feed and water often to be sure it is fresh will encourage consumption and help to prepare your lamb for weaning.

A sheep mineral and salt are also important to offer free choice to your lamb. Be sure it is of appropriate concentrations to be safe for sheep consumption.

Weaning

It is recommended that bottle lambs be weaned at 30 days of age. Before weaning, be sure the lamb is well started on water, solid feed and hay. Gradually start to reduce the number of feedings and amount of milk being fed to prepare the lamb for weaning.

Tip for Success!

Don't be tempted to alter the milk replacer concentration or to give water from the bottle.

Doing either of these things is not good for a lamb.

Signs of Concern

A hunched up lamb is hungry.

If a lamb is not drinking, adding a small amount of plain yogurt to the milk replacer mixture can help get a lamb back to eating. Providing free choice baking soda can also help to proactively eliminate stomach issues.



Bloat will present as an enlarged left side of the lamb's middle section. When pressed it will feel like it is full of gas. Immediate treatment is recommended.