

## **Ask the Vet: What are some things I can do to prepare for lambing?**

By Travis A. Hawkins, DVM  
Akron Veterinary Clinic

Well, February is here. And for those that raise sheep, lambing time is either upon us or coming soon. I have had a small sheep flock for several years, and though everyone does things a little differently, I'll just share some things that I typically do.

One thing that I like to do prior to lambing is to vaccinate my ewes for overeating and tetanus. Why worry about vaccinating the ewes now? In the past I have had trouble with these diseases in my lambs. By vaccinating the ewes with a CD&T toxoid 4-6 weeks prior to lambing, some immunity can be effectively passed on to the lambs via the colostrum. This has drastically cut down on the cases of overeating disease and virtually eliminated tetanus on my farm. I will again vaccinate the lambs as weaning time approaches.

Another thing I have found to be helpful is to shear the ewes a few weeks prior to lambing. Why would you want to take all the wool off the ewes in the middle of winter? There are several reasons. First, with all that insulation, ewes like to sleep out in the cold rather than go in where it is warm. Shorn ewes are much more likely to go inside at night and lamb there. Also, when lambs are starting to suckle, they sometimes can find wool tags to suck on rather than the teat. This is not a factor in shorn ewes. Shorn ewes also take up less space in a building and the air will be less damp than if they were covered in wool. Finally, if the ewes don't have wool on them for a few weeks before lambing, the lambs inside build up higher levels of brown fat. Brown fat forms the main energy reserves after birth, and a little more brown fat can make the difference between a lamb getting by and possibly starving.

After birth, I typically ear tag my lambs, dock their tails, and castrate them. I try to make sure the ewe is milking well and that the lamb gets a good first meal. If the umbilical cord is not dried up, I will also spray it with iodine. Many producers like to give an antibiotic or antitoxin shot to the lambs at birth. I see this as unnecessary unless you have a specific problem that you are trying to address. Keeping a clean barn and practicing sound management often eliminates the need for these measures.

These are just a few things that have worked for me over the years. Every operation is different and has to address its own needs. I have definitely learned a lot from other producers as well. Good luck to everyone during this busy time of year!