



THE  
WOOD  
VETERINARY  
GROUP



SHEEP NEWSLETTER  
JANUARY 2025

**Happy New Year! We hope you all had a wonderful festive season and are feeling (slightly) refreshed going into 2025. For some of you, lambing may already be in full swing but for those of you who haven't yet started it is time to plan ahead. This month's newsletter focuses on joint/navel ill prevention and includes information on the brand-new fluke testing kits we now have available!**

### **Fluke testing – New Rapid Antibody Testing!**

As we've mentioned before, because of the changing patterns in the UK, we can no longer accurately predict, based on calendar month alone, when our parasites are going to be emerging and causing disease in our flocks. It has been reported that flukicides are being widely overused without a prior diagnosis on farm and this can lead to the dreaded resistance issues that we are already unfortunately seeing in worming products!

Our motto is **'use as much as necessary and as little as possible'** hence why we nearly always recommend testing where possible before treatment. Not only does unnecessary treatment lead to resistance issues, it is also expensive and time consuming.

Often one of the draw backs of testing is it can take a while for results to come back from external laboratories. This, however, is no longer a problem as we now have a brand-new pen-side test! The liver fluke rapid antibody test can give results within 10 minutes and is very simple and easy to use. The test identifies fluke antibodies in the blood so ideally first season grazing animals should be sampled so you can get an idea of your **CURRENT** fluke status on farm. The lateral flow test can detect antibodies quite early in the disease, from 2 weeks post infection, and so can be the key to preventing symptoms in your flocks! The test device looks very similar to a covid lateral flow test and works in a similar way.



#### **How the process works:**

1. A lancet is used to collect a drop of blood from the nose or ear
2. The blood is then put in a sample bottle and added to the lateral flow device, followed by a buffer liquid
3. After 10 minutes, the 'Test' line on the lateral flow device can then be interpreted

Usually, to get a representative and reliable sample, one box with 10 tests should be used per management group. A vet needs to be involved in the sampling, interpretation and subsequent treatment decisions so needs planning. If you already have a visit booked with a vet on farm, then why not call to let us know you would like to do some fluke testing? Alternatively, our lovely vet tech Ellie can also perform the tests for you. This can also be an opportunity to take some faecal samples for worms and to do some body condition scoring.

We feel this is an exciting step forward in sustainable parasite control so please give us a call if you wish to discuss this further.

## Joint/navel Ill Prevention

Prevalence of joint ill on farms can be alarmingly high, reaching up to 20-50%, with mortality rates of affected lambs as high as 20% in some instances. It is vitally important to take preventative measures to reduce spread. Whether you have started lambing already or are starting to plan, it is important not to overlook the hygiene within the lambing shed - unhygienic environments are a major risk factor for joint and navel ill. However, it's not just dirty straw we need to worry about, as surprisingly, the Streptococcus bacterium that causes navel ill can survive on clean straw too, as well as being carried on equipment and personnel.



Below are some top tips to help to prevent the spread of infection and disease and ensure you have fit healthy lambs:

 **Dip the whole lamb's navel as soon as possible after birth with a 10% iodine solution to prevent infection.** Solution should also contain some **surgical spirit** to aid drying of the navel. Don't just dip once – continue **dipping every 6 hours** until the navel has dried up completely. Dipping **ear tag sites** is also recommended to prevent spread of infection.

 **Perform tagging and castrating hygienically.** Store rings and tags in a clean cupboard, away from dust and straw, and disinfect taggers and ringers with surgical spirit before each use.

 **Maintain personal hygiene when feeding lambs.** Ideally wear clean gloves when handling lambs. Wearing disposable rectal gloves when assisting ewes with lambing will help to prevent infection also.

 **Disinfect lamb bottles and tube feeders thoroughly using the following protocol.**



**Rinse** with lukewarm water

*This removes dirt and milk residues which harbour bacteria.*

*Ensure water isn't hot at this stage as this encourages milk proteins to stick to surfaces and become a breeding ground for bacteria*

**Soak** in hot water and chlorinated alkaline detergent solution for 20 minutes

*This dissolves any milk fats and proteins*

**Scrub and wash** away residues

*This breaks up biofilms of bacteria*

Hang up and **dry** completely

 **Bed down ewe pens daily and ideally muck out bonding pens completely after each ewe exits.** As with any task, the easier it is to do the more likely it is to be done. So by making sure that pens are easily accessible to muck out and having equipment and cleaning supplies readily available means the job is more likely to get done effectively.

 **Colostrum, colostrum, colostrum!** Lambs are born completely naïve to infection as, unlike humans, no antibodies cross the placenta and their only source of antibodies is via the colostrum. Every lamb must receive 50ml/kg of good quality colostrum in the first 4-6 hours of life. There will be more information on this liquid gold in next month's newsletter but in the meantime call us if you have any questions!

