



FACTSHEET

Importance of Colostrum

Colostrum is **VITAL** for all new born mammals.

The 3 species that we are particularly concerned about are calves, lambs and foals. The reason for this is that it is common for these newborns to fail to suckle adequate amounts of colostrum quickly enough after birth and the environment is often mucky leading to risk of infection.

Colostrum is the first milk produced by the dam and provides the antibodies that will form the basis of the new born animals' immune system for the first few months of life. These antibodies are quite big structures and can only be absorbed through the intestine during the first 24 hours of life – hence the time pressure.

We can test a blood sample, to check if the individual animal has had enough of these antibodies. With foals that have not had enough, we often give them a plasma transfusion which is like a blood transfusion but purely giving them the antibodies.

With calves and lambs it is normally not cost effective to give a transfusion, but as it may be a farm based problem we would look to improve things for further newborns.

The reason the hygiene of the environment is so important is that the navel, the tonsils and the intestines are “open” access to the blood stream in the first few days of life. Bacteria can gain access and cause a fatal septicaemia. For this reason it is really important to keep the birthing environment as clean and dry as possible so that the udder is clean and the challenge to the newborn is minimised.

Colostrum quality will vary between individual dams, particularly if they are in poor body condition. It is recommended to give certain vaccines to dams prior to giving birth so as to boost the specific antibodies in the colostrum. Examples of this include; Tetanus for mares, Rotavec corona for cows and Heptavac P for ewes.

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