

# Lambing

## Information Sheet

### Dealing with abortions



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Abortions are an inevitable part of lambing time and it is important to think about how you are going to deal with them. Remember that the most common diseases causing abortion can infect people and cause serious illness. Pregnant women must not be in contact with sheep at lambing time or handle dirty overalls and equipment used in the flock. Gloves should always be worn when lambing ewes and hands washed thoroughly afterwards. It is best to assume that all abortions carry a risk of disease spread to other ewes and people.

- Isolate and identify all aborted ewes - they may have discharges which will contaminate the environment and infect other ewes.
- Dispose of the lambs, placentas, and any dirty bedding.

It might not be practical to investigate every abortion but if two or more occur within a short space of time you should take steps to identify the cause. A flock/group rate of more than 2% should definitely be investigated. The best way to reach a diagnosis is to take whole aborted lambs and placentas to your local veterinary laboratory. Submitting fresh material from several ewes will increase the chance of a diagnosis being made. Placentas are very important for the diagnosis of Enzootic Abortion of Ewes (EAE).

It is better to try and reach a diagnosis during lambing time as you may be able to take steps to reduce your losses. Blood testing can be carried out on blood samples after lambing, but the number of diseases to which it applies is limited.

If EAE is diagnosed your vet may advise injecting some ewes with antibiotics, particularly if the lambing period is long.

- If infection with Toxoplasmosis is to blame check that feed stores are cat proof and avoid using the top layer of bales.
- If *Campylobacter* or *Salmonella* is the problem be careful not to transfer infection via wellies, tyres, equipment, hands and clothes to other groups of sheep. Moving ewes to a new field or reducing the stocking density, e.g. by turning out housed ewes, can help but is often not practical. Turning feed troughs upside down will stop birds contaminating the feeding surface with faeces.
- Listerial abortions are often associated with silage feeding. Feed the best available silage and clear away any that is uneaten before supplying more.

A diagnosis can allow you to plan for the future. This could include vaccination, rodent control, silage management, food storage, or changes to the management of replacements.

Visit [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot) for further information or contact the helpline on 0300 323 0161, or by email at [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot)