



Lamb and kid care: The first 48 hours

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Lamb/kid care is essential in the first 48 hours of life. It is important to monitor them often to ensure they are bonding with the dam, progressing properly, and remaining healthy.

First breaths

Ensure the lamb/kid is breathing by observing the movement of the chest cavity. If the offspring does not appear to be breathing and the dam has not cleaned it up completely, begin by clearing the nose, mouth, and head of any mucus (Figure 1). The lamb/kid can be stimulated to breathe by vigorously rubbing the head and thorax with a dry towel or by initiating sneezing with a piece of straw. Additionally, you can grasp it firmly by the hind legs and swing it between your legs in an arc to remove any mucus in its airway.

Note: Do this quickly and then place the lamb/kid at the dam's head so she can finish any cleaning and begin bonding



Figure 1. St. Croix ewe cleaning her newborn lamb (Virginia State University, 2016)

Nursing

Nursing shortly after birth is vital for newborn lambs and kids, as it ensures they receive colostrum, which contains essential antibodies for immunity and survival. Early nursing also fosters bonding with the dam, reduces stress, and encourages maternal care.

Colostrum is the nutrient-rich milk produced by the dam within the first 18 hours post-birth. It contains vital antibodies that support the newborn's immune system. Ensure the lamb or kid consumes sufficient colostrum within the first few hours, as their intestines can only absorb antibodies during the initial 16–24 hours. If natural nursing is not possible, provide frozen (Figure 2) or powdered colostrum. Freezing sheep/goat colostrum is an effective way to preserve its rich supply of nutrients and antibodies, which are essential for the health of newborns. This frozen supply can be a lifesaving resource for orphaned, rejected, or unable-to-nurse lambs/kids, and when properly stored, it can remain viable for up to a year or longer. Tube feeding may be necessary for weak or small newborns. Figure 3 is a QR code link to a video on how to properly tube-feed a lamb or kid.

Note: Newborn lambs and kids should receive 10% of their body weight in colostrum by 18 hours of age (split into 3 – 4 feedings).

Supplementation

Continued observation of lamb and kid nursing is essential. If a decrease or lack of milk intake is observed, supplementation with a high-quality lamb/kid powdered milk replacer is necessary until weaning (2 – 3 months). Follow the directions on the label to prepare the mixture and feed with a bottle and nipple.

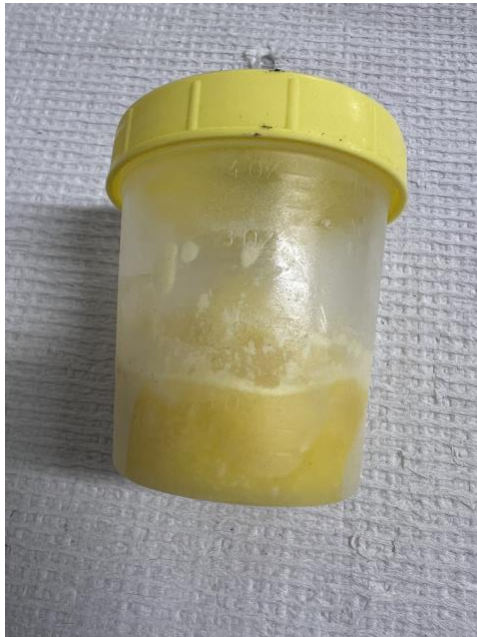


Figure 2. Frozen colostrum (Virginia State University, 2016)



Figure 3. QR code link to YouTube video on How to tube feed a newborn lamb/kid (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaUqp8rNzB4&list=PLHFHaKgV4IGSKZu6fz88caRD_oEGQA_D4v&index=2&t=9s; Virginia State University, 2022)

Early feces

Meconium refers to the lamb/kids' first defecation, and it should be dark, sticky, and thick (indicating that the digestive system is working correctly). The feces should then turn yellow or brown, with pellets becoming normal as the lamb/kid approaches 4 weeks of age. If the lamb/kid develops scours or diarrhea (loose, watery stool), it could be due to a change in milk and can clear up quickly. However, if it persists, it may indicate an infection and should be diagnosed and treated promptly.

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2025

APSC-240NP

Iodine Dip

The navel must be dipped in a 7% iodine solution as soon as possible after birth to prevent bacteria from entering the navel and causing an infection. It is best to use a wide-mouth plastic container for storage and iodine application. To administer, place the lamb/kid on its rump and submerge the umbilical cord in the iodine by pressing the container against the lamb's/kid's body. To ensure that the iodine covers the entire cord/navel, lean the lamb further on its back.