



Farm Vet News

Endell Farm Vets Blog

Endell Vets Smallholders Team

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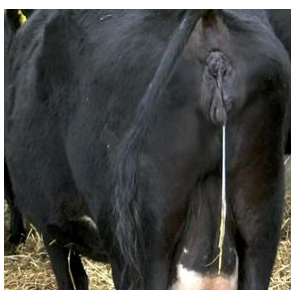
What to expect when you're expecting

In this article we will cover normal parturition, when to intervene, when to call the vet and how to care for your new-borns.

NORMAL PARTURITION

There are three stages of labour;

Stage 1 - The animal will separate herself from the rest of the group and seems restless. She may get up and down frequently and appear to be in pain. During this phase her cervix will dilate and string like mucus will be expelled from her vulva. This stage usually lasts anywhere between two to six hours but can vary greatly between animals. This stage is usually longer in animals who have never given birth before.



The first stage of labour can take anywhere from two to six hours and is usually longer in first time mums.

Stage 2 - A water bag will protrude out of the vulva and will usually rupture quickly. The animal will often lie down and can be seen to push. The front limbs will start to protrude out of the vulva, followed by the head until the whole newborn is delivered. This stage typically takes an hour however varies from 30 minutes to two hours. For animals with multiple young, there can be an interval of 10 to 60 minutes between siblings.



Stage 3 - During this stage the placenta and foetal membranes are expelled. This typically occurs within two to three hours after she has given birth. Animals will often eat their placenta, this is completely normal

and is a good source of nutrients. If an animal doesn't expel their placenta within 12 hours it is considered retained and veterinary advice should be sought.



Table 1. Typical duration of each stage of parturition

CARING FOR THE NEONATE

First 10 minutes:

Stage	Duration
Stage 1 - cervical dilation	Two to six hours
Stage 2 - expulsion of foetus(es)	Thirty minutes to two hours
Stage 3 - expulsion of placenta	Two to three hours

- Remove any membranes around the nose and mouth of the new-born and check for breathing.
- Rub the newborn with straw or stick straw up their nose to stimulate breathing.
- If you have assisted the birth, feel the ribs and limbs for any obvious fractures.
- Sit the newborn in sternal recumbency, shown in the image below.
- Allow the dam and newborn to bond before dipping their navel with a 1-2% iodine solution, 10-15 minutes after birth.



First Three Hours:

- Over the first hour a newborn should be attempting to stand and suckling well within 2 hours.
- Check for in-turned eyelids.
- Check that the mother is giving milk from all teats.
- Avoid unnecessary interference

First 24 hours:

- Re-dip the navel 4-6 hours after birth with iodine to decrease the risk of diseases such as navel ill.
- To decrease the risk of hypothermia ensure lambs stay dry and make sure they are feeding regularly.
- Ensure good hygiene at all times.

To Intervene Or Not To Intervene?

This is the most important question we need to ask ourselves and not one to be taken lightly. It has been shown in research published by *Caldow et al* in 2005 that any intervention in cattle will decrease their breeding success in future seasons, so it is fair to say that intervention should never be considered innocuous. Therefore it is important not to intervene too early, nor is it acceptable to intervene too late due to the potential negative outcomes. Unfortunately there are no hard and fast rules to guarantee success but the boxes below contain some guidelines which should hopefully be helpful.

When to Intervene:	Assessing the Situation:	When to Call The Vet:
<p>Considering the stages of normal labour as discussed above, it is reasonable to intervene when the process is not progressing as it should.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stage one lasting for longer than 8 hours (remember it may take longer in first time mothers!).● Water sac visible for 2 hours but no signs of progress● The mother appears to be straining hard for 30 minutes during stage two but not progressing.● The mother stops trying for 15-20 minutes after a period of progress.● Signs of excessive fatigue in the mother or evidence of bleeding from the vagina.● The neonate's tongue appears swollen.● The afterbirth is visible prior to the neonates birth.● Some people use the "two feet two hours rule" - two feet are present at the vulva for greater than 2 hours.	<p>If you are going to intervene you must do so as cleanly as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Clean around the anus and vulva.● Wash any parts of the infant that are sticking out● Wear gloves.● If possible, move to an area with clean and dry bedding.● Lubrication: USE LOTS OF IT & USE IT FROM THE START. <p>The most important things to check are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>Vagina</i>: What is present? Any tears or bleeding?● <i>Cervix</i>: How dilated is it?● <i>Neonate position</i>: Is it in the normal position? Frontwards or backwards? What can you feel?● <i>Neonate size</i>: How big is it? Is there any space in the pelvis? Are the legs crossing?● <i>Dead or alive</i>: This can be difficult to determine but is the neonate responsive? Is there a foul smell? <p>Try not to burst the water sac as the fluid keeps the neonate lubricated</p>	<p>After assessing the situation you need to make a decision as to whether the animal needs more time, needs some assistance from yourself, or needs assistance from a vet. Some situations where it is advisable to call a vet are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The neonate appears to be too big to be delivered naturally.● You cannot safely manipulate the neonate into a suitable position for it to be delivered.● Incomplete cervical dilation not responding to 10-15 minutes of attempting to open it with gentle manual pressure.● Any concerns regarding a tear.● Evidence of bleeding from the vagina or uterus. <p>Again, these are only guidelines and even highly experienced stock-people can struggle to decide when the right time is to step in and when to seek assistance.</p> <p>However, if you are concerned, our vets are on hand 24/7 to either give you advice over the phone or to come and see the animal in question.</p>

COLOSTRUM

Colostrum is the initial portion of the dam's milk. It is essential that new-borns receive an adequate volume over the first 24 hours. Not only does it provide energy and warmth, but also antibodies that are vital to protect them against diseases for the first month of life, until they develop their own immune system. Colostrum recommendations are as follows:

- New-borns should receive a first feed of 10% of their body weight followed up by a similar sized feed within 12 hours of birth
 - 3-5L for calves (AHDB, 2015a)
 - 0.3-0.5L for lambs (AHDB, 2015b)
- More information on colostrum feeding can be found on the AHDB website or by speaking to one of our team members.

SUMMARY

Spring can be a stressful time of the year for many smallholders. With many holdings welcoming new life into their herd or flock. If done right, it can also be incredibly rewarding. We hope that knowing what to expect in contrast to what is abnormal will give you more confidence in what the birthing process should look like and what you should do, from not interfering, to assisting the dam, or contacting a vet.

If you would like a pre or post lambing visit, please contact our office (01722 333291) for further details.