



VACCINATING OF SHEEP

There are many diseases for which sheep and goats can be vaccinated, but there is only one universally-recommended vaccine, and it is for the clostridial diseases that commonly affect small ruminants



Clostridial diseases are fatal diseases that strike ruminant livestock suddenly, often causing death before any clinical signs are seen.

Clostridia (bacteria) are widespread in the environment. They are normally found in the soil and feces. They are also present in the digestive tract and tissues of healthy animals. For these reasons, vaccination is the best way to prevent disease outbreaks.

Pregnant ewes and does should be vaccinated with the CDT (toxoid) during their last month of pregnancy, but at least two weeks before they are due to lamb/kid. First-time moms should be vaccinated twice in late pregnancy, 3 and 6 weeks before parturition. Rams, bucks, and wethers should receive an annual booster for CDT.

Lambs and kids will receive passive, temporary immunity to CDT when they consume colostrum. This immunity will start to wane after about six weeks. Thus, lambs and kids from vaccinated dams should receive their first CDT vaccination by the time they are 6-8 weeks of age, followed by a booster 3-4 weeks later.

<https://www.sheepandgoat.com/cdt>



Lambs and kids from unvaccinated dams should receive their first CDT vaccination when they are 3-4 weeks of age, followed by a booster 3-4 weeks later. Earlier vaccinations may not be effective, due to many factors, including the immature immune system of young lambs and kids.

The tetanus antitoxin should be administered at the time of docking, castrating, and disbudding, as lambs and kids from unvaccinated dams will lack protection (from tetanus). An antitoxin provides immediate, short-term immunity, whereas the toxoid provides longer-lasting immunity, but takes time and a second shot to complete the immune process.

A pre-lambing vaccination is the only way to protect lambs and kids from type C, though the antitoxin could be administered in the event of a disease outbreak. Purchased feeder lambs and kids should be vaccinated twice for clostridium perfringens type D (“classic” overeating disease). You should vaccinate any animal’s whose vaccination status is unknown.

The CDT vaccine is administered subcutaneously (under the skin) by pulling up a handful of skin to make a “tent,” and sliding the needle into the base of the tent and pressing the plunger. Subcutaneously injections can be given high in the neck, in the axilla (arm pit) region, or over the ribs.

Sometimes, an abscess will develop at the injection site. For this reason, the axilla is usually the best injection site, especially for market lambs and goats and show animals.

All vaccines should be stored and used according to the manufacturer’s label. Needles used to vaccinate animals should not be used to draw vaccine into the syringe. Needles should be changed frequently. Ideally, a clean needle should be used for each animal. An 18- or 20-gauge needle is suitable for CD-T vaccinations.



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Other diseases

In addition to clostridial diseases, there are various other diseases for which sheep can be vaccinated. The decision to administer additional vaccines should be based on the health status of the flock, the perceived disease risk of the flock, and prevalence of diseases in the geographic area where the flock is located. In the US (for sheep), there are approved vaccines for sore mouth, foot rot, caseous lymphadenitis, abortion, *e. coli* scours, pneumonia, epididymitis, and rabies.

Giving Vaccines

Most vaccines are given subcutaneously (sub-Q), i.e. under the skin. Some vaccines are given intramuscularly (IM).

For subcutaneous vaccines, a 1/2 or 3/4 inch, 18- or 20-gauge needle should be used. Subcutaneous vaccinations can be given over the ribs, behind the armpit (axilla), or high up on the neck. The needle used to withdraw vaccine from the bottle should not be the same needle used to inject the animal.

In order for vaccination programs to be successful, label directions need to be carefully followed. Vaccines should be stored, handled, and administered properly.



Only healthy sheep and lambs should be vaccinated.

