

## JOINT ILL IN LAMBS

Joint ill is mainly caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus dysgalactiae*.  
Joint ill occurs even when hygiene and colostrum intake are good.

The condition first reported in 1925 – so 2025 marks its centenary! But has anything changed in our approach?

In 2020, a survey was carried out and over 2,500 samples were tested. Some headlines:

Typically cases occur more frequently later in the lambing period and that in the main affected lambs were under a month old.

### Factors that increase the risk of joint ill:

- Increased flock size
- Greater number of lambs born

### Factors that reduce the risk of joint ill:

- Handwashing
- Provision of outdoor shelter
- Excellent eartag hygiene

### Where are the sources of infection?

Infection is everywhere: ewes, lambs, the environment.

#### Ewes

- Not all ewes carry infection but many do (in saliva, vagina, udder skin, rectum...)
- Carrier ewes seem to be a tiny minority

#### Environment:

- Soil, straw and faeces can all harbour infection – for very different amounts of time! Liming was also shown to have a very beneficial effect:
 

○ Dry straw	14 days	With lime:	No survival
○ Damp straw	14 days	With lime:	20 mins kill time
○ Soil and mud	21 days	With lime:	No effect after 1 hour
○ Wood shavings	No survival with and without lime		
- Birth products and the lamb trailer appear to be a significant source

Multiple routes into the lamb exist: wounds, skin, rectum, mouth....

Read on for management options!



## Joint ill continued

### What to do in an outbreak

- Call the vet! We will
  - Look at the environment – including that from a few days before the outbreak
  - Examine lambs for possible routes of infection
  - Sample a couple of cases to check for other possible bacterial causes such as *Staph aureus* and *Erysipelas*, which may have a different management strategy
  - Sample lambs to check the transfer of immunity via colostrum has been adequate
- Treat effectively
  - Treat early
  - Use penicillin (some strains are amoxicillin resistant)
  - Treat for long enough, 5-7 days of daily injections
  - Give pain relief – Metacam under the skin at 0.5ml per 10kg (off license)
- Hygiene
  - Dip navels twice / until navel is dry – or use NoBacZ Navel which rarely needs a second application
  - Keep wounds and equipment as clean as possible
  - Keep feeding equipment clean
  - Delay ringing and tagging – or spray tags and rings with NoBacZ Navel
  - Wear gloves when lambing
  - Handwashing
- Environment
  - Remove birth products as soon as possible from pens
  - Clean out the lamb trailer regularly
  - Change straw; lime regularly
  - Use shavings instead of straw
  - In an outbreak, move to a fresh field or shed

