

# Lambing



## Disclaimer

A series of booklets has been developed by the Clinical Skills Lab team (staff, recent graduates and students) from the School of Veterinary Sciences, University of Bristol, UK.

Please note:

- Each booklet illustrates one way to perform a skill and it is acknowledged that there are often other approaches. Before using the booklets students should check with their university or college whether the approach illustrated is acceptable in their context or whether an alternative method should be used.
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## Equipment list: Lambing

### Equipment for this station:

- Lambing tank ('ewe' model)
- Model lamb (with fully articulating limbs, neck, etc.)
- Lambing ropes
- Head snare (loop)
- Rectal (arm length) gloves

### Considerations for this station:

- Place the lamb in the model inside the plastic bag (uterus). You may want to get a friend to position the lamb for you so that you use your hand to feel the presentation rather than looking.
- Always wear a clean, new pair of arm length gloves for lambing.

Anyone working in the Clinical Skills Lab must read the 'CSL\_I01 Induction' and agree to abide by the 'CSL\_I00 House Rules' & 'CSL\_I02 Lab Area Rules'

Please inform a member of staff if equipment is damaged or about to run out.

# Clinical Skills: Lambing



1  
Wear arm length gloves.  
Make one hand into a cone (or bird's beak) shape. Pass your hand through the vulva and into the model's vagina. Once inside, open your hand and feel for the lamb e.g. the feet, head or tail.

If you feel legs it is important to differentiate between forelimbs and hindlimbs.



2  
**Forelimb:** When flexing a front leg, the joints (fetlock and carpus) flex in the same direction creating a 'U' shape

**Hindlimb:** When flexing a hind leg, the joints (fetlock and hock) create a 'Z' shape.

Practise on the lamb model to feel the difference.

Also move your hand up the leg to palpate:

**Forelimb:** Spine of the scapula

**Hindlimb:** The pelvis.



3  
**Using ropes:** Lambing ropes can be really useful to help secure the legs in the correct position.

Make a loop in the rope ready to apply to the leg. The long free end of the rope is used to pull the loop tight.



4  
Place the loop of the rope over your fingers and enter the vagina and feel for the leg. The long end of the rope is ready to pull tight with your other hand when you have the loop secured on the leg.



5  
Place the loop of the rope over the metacarpal bone i.e. just **above** the fetlock, and pull the long end of rope to tighten the loop.

Feel for the other leg and apply another lambing rope to that leg.

Ensure the legs are a pair i.e. belonging/attached to the same lamb.



**Using a head snare (a):** Hold the end of the snare with your non-dominant hand and place the loop over your dominant hand. Feel for the lamb's head and place the loop behind both of the ears before pulling the 'wire' tight in the mouth (picture 6a).

A **rope (b)** can also be used.

When tightening the loop ensure it is in the mouth and not around the neck.



# Clinical Skills: Lambing

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**Normal presentation:** Feel for the head, the ears are dorsal and jaw ventral. The two forelimbs should be either side of the head. Ensure the legs are both forelimbs and both belong to the head i.e. from the same lamb. Apply ropes to the legs and a snare or rope to the head. Then pull the legs out (together or one at a time) and downwards towards the ewe's hindlimbs and ensure the head follows.

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**Front leg(s) back:** This is a common malpresentation. The head appears at the vulva but one or both legs are bent backwards. Bring the limb forward to the correct position by cupping the foot in your hand to avoid damaging the uterus. Always try to have both legs forward before attempting to deliver the lamb. It may be helpful to gently push the lamb back into the uterus before starting to correct the malpresentation.

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**Head back:** Try to reposition the head by cupping it with your hand or place the snare or a rope behind the lamb's ears and into the mouth (as described previously). Secure both of the legs in the birth canal with ropes. Apply traction to the snare or head rope and use your hand or fingers to guide the lamb's nose towards the pelvis. When the head is in the correct position, the lamb can be delivered by applying gentle traction to the ropes and snare.

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**Posterior presentation:** It is quite common for one lamb to come backwards in multiple births. The lamb should be delivered backwards (as it is not possible to correct or turn the position). Have a good grip on both of the legs, perhaps using ropes, before starting to apply traction as it is important to deliver these lambs quickly due to the risk of the umbilical cord breaking or being compressed whilst the lamb's head is still in the uterus (and the lamb cannot breath).

11



**Breech presentation:** This is similar to a posterior presentation except the hind legs are pointing towards the ewe's head so only a tail can be felt. Reach forward to cup the foot of one of the legs and bring it back into the birth canal. Repeat with the other leg. Then deliver the lamb as for a posterior presentation.

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If practising lambing with dead lambs in the PM room (rather than with the model lamb) use lubrication. Also use a lubricant when lambing a ewe on a farm.



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## Resetting the station: Lambing

1. Remove all lambing aids (rope/s and/or snare) from the lamb.
2. Put the lamb back into the model ewe in a position of your choice once you have lambed it, ready for the next person.

*Station ready for the next person:*



Please inform a member of staff if equipment is damaged or about to run out.

# I wish I'd known:

## Lambing

- In a real lambing situation you have to decide when to intervene. Circumstances in which help is required include: only the head appears, a tail or only one leg appears, the water bag has been delivered but there has been no further progress for approximately 30 minutes, the ewe has been lambing for a prolonged period (e.g. 60 minutes) with no obvious progress.
- Wear a clean, new pair of arm length gloves to avoid introducing infection to the ewe.
- Also it is important to be aware of the potential zoonotic infections present at lambing.
- Use lubrication as required.
- If you can feel legs, ensure they both belong to the same lamb before starting to apply traction. Remember there may be twins or triplets.
- If you can feel a malpresentation don't be afraid to gently push the lamb back into the uterus to make it easier to correct the presentation.
- It is generally considered advisable to give an antibiotic injection (e.g. penicillin) to any ewe that has required assistance during lambing. However, it is recommended that you check the most up to date advice on the use of antimicrobials in this context.