

Supply of strong iodine (10%) for navel dressing of neonatal lambs

There is a risk of reduced availability/high cost of strong iodine for navel dressing this spring. This has arisen due to production ceasing at the main source in Chile, causing prices to quadruple.

Lower iodine concentrations (often quoted as below 7%) are considered to be less effective in drying and disinfecting the navel.

Navel dressing is important however it must be remembered that most cases of joint ill and other bacteraemic conditions follow invasion of bacteria via the tonsils or intestinal tract from a heavily contaminated environment (Sargison 2008).

- The most important things flock keepers can do to avoid these conditions is ensure an adequate supply of quality colostrum through management of the body condition and nutrition of pregnant ewes (which may involve forage analysis and metabolic profiling in later pregnancy), good colostrum intake and the provision of a clean and dry lambing environment.
- It is not appropriate to use tetracycline antibiotic sprays for treating the navels of neonatal lambs – they do not dry them very effectively and it is an unnecessary use of antibiotics
- Similarly, it is not appropriate to plan to use blanket systemic/oral antibiotic prophylaxis of lambs to control neonatal infections

Alternative navel dressings

There are proprietary alternatives on the market. However, there are little or no data available on their use in lambs, and very limited data available on their use in calves. There are anecdotal reports of successful use of all the alternatives below, however inclusion does not constitute an SVS recommendation.

Alternatives include:

Vetericyn Super 7 Plus spray/dip – sodium hydroxide and alcohol in electrolysed water (which produces sodium hydroxide), with sodium bicarbonate. Small study showing reduced navel drying time in calves compared with 7% iodine tincture with no increase in infections

Reperiderma spray – chelated copper sulphate, zinc chloride and alcohol in butane. Small study showing no significant difference in navel drying time or signs of navel infection compared with 4% iodine

4% chlorhexidine, or a 50/50 mix 4% chlorhexidine and alcohol – there are limited studies reporting equivalence with 7% iodine

Other products that have been used include 70% alcohol (dries the navel but antibacterial effects are short lasting) and copper sulphate solution (may not dry as effectively, precautions required to avoid contact with skin, eyes and clothing).

It is important to scrutinise the safety datasheet for whatever product is used, including the requirements for disposal.

In summary

Ensure an adequate supply of quality colostrum through management of the body condition and nutrition of pregnant ewes, ensure good colostrum intake and provide a clean and dry lambing environment.

If alternatives to 7% iodine are required as navel dressings:

- Agents that desiccate with residual antibacterial activity are likely to be the best choice
- Do not use tetracycline antibiotic sprays to dress navels of neonatal lambs
- Products with iodine concentrations lower than 7% will be less effective and so are not recommended
- It is important to scrutinise the safety datasheet for whatever product is used

References -

<https://extension.sdstate.edu/navel-dips-lambs-and-kids>

Sargison (2008) Sheep Flock Health. Oxford. Blackwell.