

ORPHAN LAMB SURVIVAL GUIDE

Lambs that become pets generally do so because they have had a rough start to life, and this immediately puts them at high risk of illness and death.

FEEDING: It is best to assume that all pet lambs have not received colostrum; ideally the first day's feeds should be with some type of colostrum:

- Ewe colostrum (fresh or frozen) is best but may will likely be difficult to source
- Cow colostrum (fresh or frozen) from a dairy farm
- Commercially available colostrum powder

Warming/thawing frozen liquid colostrum is best done by placing the (completely sealed) container in a warm water bath and allowing it to heat through slowly, do NOT microwave.

Day ONE: Give five warm feeds spaced out as evenly as possible. About 125ml per feed for a 4kg lamb (total 15% of lamb's bodyweight) - there is no need to get up at 2am to squeeze in that sixth feed - save that for human babies!

Day TWO to FOUR: Big robust lambs that have adapted well to the bottle can be brought back to four or even three feeds a day, although most of the lamb milk replacer directions will say they should still be on five feeds.

Day FIVE onwards: Transition lambs onto cold, yoghurt-ised milk, see below.

The table below details B+LNZ's guidelines for feeding orphan lambs; practically however, small lambs in their first few days of life may struggle to drink the amounts stated here and it may be better to split the total amount into smaller feeds as detailed above.

Quantity/number of milk feeds for ORPHAN lambs (days)	Volume (mls) per feed	Feeds per day
1 to 3	200 to 250	3
4 to 7	300	3
8 to 11	350 for 2 feeds, 200 for middle feed	3
12 to 14	400	2
15 to 24	500	2
25 to 28	500	1

Source: B+LNZ R&D Brief 146: Rearing Orphan Lambs

All guidelines for feed rates for pet lambs are based on a lamb of 'average' birth weight; around 4.5 kg, so adjust feed levels accordingly for small lambs. Once older lambs have adapted well to meal, as little as 350ml of yoghurt milk mix twice daily to big lambs is plenty and reduces the risk of abomasal bloat.



Choice of milk type

Conventional wisdom suggests commercial lamb milk replacers will give the best results as they are formulated specifically for lambs. However, many lamb rearers find that calf milk replacer or dairy farm sourced colostrum works fine, and local trial work has shown superior lamb growth rates on the latter source.

Individual lambs may be more prone to scouring when fed calf milk replacer (CMR). Reducing the amount of water added to CMR by about 20% can sometimes fix the problem.

However whatever milk type is used it cannot be emphasised enough to

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Cold Yoghurt Milk Feeding:

The most common cause of loss of pet lambs that have made it past the first week is abomasal bloat, and it is REALLY common. A proliferation of the gas-producing *Sarcinia* bacteria on lactose in the abomasum is widely implicated as the most common cause of abomasal bloat. Rearing lambs on cold yoghurt-ised milk will virtually eliminate this issue and many people find it reduces the incidence of scours as well.

For two or three pet lambs on milk replacer the following works fine and doesn't require any investment in special gear:

1. Make up double the amount of milk replacer you need in a lidded bucket.
2. Make sure the volume of the bucket is twice that of your milk or you may have a big mess to clean up!
3. Use water that is warmer than you would feed to the lambs, almost as hot as a fresh cup of tea.
4. Dump a large container of unsweetened acidophilus yoghurt into your bucket of warm milk replacer and whisk well.
5. Leave in the hot water cupboard for six to twelve hours, depending on how long it takes to thicken; sitting it on a hot water bottle can help.
6. The mix may vary from bubbly thick-shake, to crusty cream cheese sitting on top of clear liquid, to thick commercial yoghurt.
7. Regardless, when it's time to feed the lambs, whisk it up, decant the amount you need (dilute a little with cold water if necessary or cut the lamb teats open a bit if it is too thick) and feed away!
8. You may want to give lambs half yoghurt mix and half their ordinary milk replacer when you first introduce it, but they normally go onto it without any issues.
9. Make up an equal volume of milk replacer to what you removed; again quite warm, and whisk into existing yoghurt mix, put back in hot water cupboard, ready for the next feed.
10. You can change the bucket every so often for a clean one if you prefer!
11. You may need to occasionally 'recharge' the mixture with extra yoghurt if gets too thin or seems not to be fermenting well

The advantage of this system is that it is no more work than mixing milk replacer in the normal manner.

MEAL FEEDING:

Lambs will grow and adapt better to life post-weaning if they are accustomed to eating meal from an early age. There are now a number of very palatable lamb start mixes that lambs will start eating within their first week of life if they are kept in a shed or yard with limited grass in the initial weeks. Once they are eating meal well, they can have access to grass. Continue feeding it throughout the milk feeding period (ad-lib), and for several weeks post-weaning. Lambs which are adapted to meal are easier to deal with later if the grass runs out in a dry summer as they will eat supplement readily.

Ensure that the meal you use contains a coccidiostat; artificially reared lambs living outdoors on grass can be very susceptible to coccidiosis. This typically affects lambs under 20kg liveweight but can occasionally cause morbidity and even mortality in older, bigger lambs.

RUNNY BOTTOMS:

It is very common for individual lambs to develop diarrhoea at some point. Usually this is as a result of overfeeding. If the lamb is still bright and drinking, simply reduce the amount of water in its milk mix for a few feeds – around 20 to 25% less water for the same amount of powder. If you are using yoghurt mix just add a tablespoon or two of the yoghurt mix to what you have prepared for your scouring lamb. Watch for constipation when feeding an increased milk strength – it can happen quite quickly! A lamb that is scouring, refusing its feeds and is dull needs a different approach so contact your vet.

PNUEMONIA:

It is very common for bottle fed lambs to inadvertently inhale some milk whilst feeding and develop pneumonia. The first sign of this is often a lamb which has been drinking fine and then suddenly seems to not want to finish its bottle, or pulls off the bottle a lot, often with a cough associated. These come right quickly if treated promptly with a course of antibiotics. It pays to check that the hole in the teat is not too large if this has happened, as this can be a common cause.