

# Farm Safety during lambing

While physical risks of injury from sheep may be lower than livestock, health risks may be greater especially with musculoskeletal disorders and contracting zoonotic diseases. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) list the main risk factors associated with back pain and musculoskeletal disorders among members of the farming community as; lifting heavy loads, awkward postures, lifting loads to a height or to ground level, repetitive movements and poor workplace set up. Many of these risk factors can be present on sheep farms especially at lambing time.

**It is important to look for ways to reduce these risks by making sure the work is planned and organised.**

## Sheep lambing facilities

Sheep may lamb indoors or outdoors but in both situations it is important that there are adequate facilities present to ensure activities can be easily planned, managed and controlled.

### Lambing outdoors

Good fencing and sheep handling equipment are a must when lambing outdoors. Sheep gates and penning in the field or to provide passageways into a shed will assist in drafting out sheep that need assistance at lambing.

### Lambing indoors

Sheep can be housed in purpose-built sheds or in existing farm buildings. These buildings must be structurally sound and suitably located. Subdividing the shed with penning will help create more manageable groups. Lambing pens should be located adjacent to the group pens.

### Lighting

It is important to ensure all sheds and access passageways have good lighting. The lighting and wiring in the yard should be checked by a qualified electrician regularly. Dull or faded lights should be replaced.

### Lambing cameras

Lambing cameras can be a useful aid to reduce risks around lambing so you can monitor from a distance as well as easing the workload and fatigue involved. Cameras can also help to avoid disturbing the natural lambing activity.

## Reduce animal stress at lambing

Animals giving birth or preparing to give birth can be easily disturbed and stressed by dogs or children close by. So, keep children and dogs well away from the lambing pens at this time.

## Handling pregnant ewes

Most ewes will lamb on their own in their own time. Correct ewe body condition, nutrition and adequate space at the feed barrier will all help reduce the need for assisted lambing. However, you will always have some difficult births and some will need intervention. Ensure gates are available to help catch the ewe in a controlled low stress manner.

Manual handling will be a common risk factor at lambing so assistance holding the ewe in the correct position will reduce the risk of bending and twisting the back and thus prevent possible back injury to the handler.



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## Zoonotic Diseases

### Prevent Toxoplasmosis infection

- Discuss control of toxoplasmosis infection with your vet.
- Cat droppings from young cats are an infection source on the farm. Neutering existing farm cats helps reduce the risk of infection as it allows an aged population of cats to develop. These older neutered cats will keep out strays & avoid kittens. Ideally feed stores should be cat proof. However, cat droppings on hay, silage or bedding can also cause infection.
- A vaccine is available. One injection usually gives lifelong protection. Generally, it is only necessary to vaccinate replacements.

## Pregnant women at lambing

Pregnant women who come into close contact with sheep during lambing or other farm animals that are giving birth may risk their own health, and that of their unborn child, from infections that such animals can carry.

It is important that pregnant women are aware of the potential risks and take appropriate precautions.

Pregnant women should seek immediate medical advice if they experience fever or influenza-like symptoms, or if they are concerned that they could have acquired infection from the farm environment.

To avoid the possible risk of infection at lambing time, pregnant women should consider the following advice:

- Avoid close contact with ewes about to lamb.
- Keep away from aborted or new-born lambs, or with the afterbirth, birthing fluids or any bedding materials contaminated by such birth products.
- Do not touch or handle clothing, boots or any materials that may have come into contact with ewes that have recently given birth, their lambs or afterbirths. It will be safe to handle any potentially contaminated clothing which has been washed on a hot cycle.
- Pregnant women should ensure that their partners or other contacts who have attended lambing ewes take appropriate health and hygiene precautions, including the wearing of personal protective equipment and clothing and adequate washing to remove any potential contamination.

These risks are not only associated with sheep, nor confined only to the spring lambing season. Cattle and goats that have recently given birth can also carry similar infections.

Farmers have a responsibility to minimise these risks to pregnant women, including members of their family, the public and professional staff visiting farms.

Further information on Farm Safety risks and precautions are available in the *Code of Practice for Preventing Injury and Occupational Ill health in Agriculture published by the Health and Safety Authority.*

Other useful information relating to this area has been published by the Health and Safety Executive UK entitled *HSE Information Sheet 2- Common Zoonoses in Agriculture.*

For further information:  
Visit [www.hsa.ie/farmsafety](http://www.hsa.ie/farmsafety)

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An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta  
Health and Safety Authority