



Hand Rearing Goat Kids and Lambs

Dr Jennie Mohler, BS, BVSc, MANZCVS

Hand rearing a baby goat or lamb can be a rewarding and challenging experience. If you have a recently orphaned or abandoned kid/lamb, here are a few tips that may assist you in the care and rearing of your new addition.

A. FEEDING

There are several commercially available milk replacement powders designed specifically for goats and lambs. Most come in 20-kilogram bags. Feeding of Divetelact is discouraged as it is low in lactose and energy.

An alternative to milk replacer is feeding **full cream** milk powder. It is an economical way to hand rear kids and lambs, especially if you only have one or two. To prepare, mix 1 cup of full cream milk powder into 3 cups of warm water. Keep in a container in the refrigerator until use.

When feeding milk replacers, it is important to avoid overheating the milk. Test milk on the skin of your inner wrist before feeding. If it burns your skin or uncomfortably hot, it will burn the kid/lamb's mouth.

Often, orphaned goat kids will reject milk replacers, initially. We recommend starting kids on pasteurized goat milk which can be found in the milk section of the supermarket. Blending the milk replacer with goat milk until the kid accepts the replacer helps in the transition.

How much to feed?

Lambs and kids should be fed 15-20% of their body weight in milk or milk replacer each day. Weighing kids/lambs once a week and calculating a target feeding volume at 20% from this weight. As the kid/lamb grows this practice will ensure that it receives adequate energy to grow.

If possible, feed the goat kids/lambs four times a day (but 3 times a day is fine) for the first week and then transition to twice a day. If goat kid/lamb weighs 2 kilograms, he/she will need 400mL of milk per day divided over two or three feedings.

DO NOT OVER FEED!! Kids and lambs when healthy and bright are ravenous drinkers!! Overfeeding can lead to bloating, constipation or diarrhoea. The typical "human" baby bottle holds 250mL when filled to the top.

Human baby bottles are ideal for feeding small kids and lambs. Enlarging the hole in the standard nipple to allow for better flow will facilitate feeding.

Colostrum

Colostrum is the milk that newborn kids and lambs receive from their mother in the first few days of life. Colostrum is rich in proteins, fat and immunoglobulins that help protect the kid/lamb from infections and act as an immune system. If your kid or lamb is a newborn, colostrum should be fed within the first 48 hours

Hand Rearing Goat Kids and Lambs

of life. Occasionally, we have colostrum available for sale at the LVS, please contact us if you require colostrum.

B. HUSBANDRY

Keep your new kid or lamb warm and free from drafts and damp. Heat lamps can be used to provide warmth. However, keep out of reach to avoid burning or electrical shock injuries. Cat/dog crates are ideal for housing kids and lambs during the first weeks of life. Kids are extremely curious, providing safe areas and pens for exploring, grazing and exercising is essential as they develop and mature.

C. STARTING SOLIDS & WEANING

Kids/lambs should be offered fresh water and solid foods in the first week of life in the form of oaten or lucerne chaff. Start with a small handful and increase when consumption is observed. Offer fresh chaff each day and discard refused feed.

At 2-3 weeks of age, kids/lambs should be started on a multipurpose weaner pellets (18-22% crude protein) as well as a chaff/hay. Begin with a small amount of pellets (tablespoon to start) and replace daily as with chaff/hay. Once your kid/lamb is eating 3-4% of its weight in solid feed, usually 4-6 weeks of age, then weaning from milk should begin.

Lambs and goat kids are very vocal and demanding with regards to bottles and feedings. Weaning time can be a very distressing to both you and the kid/lamb. It is usually advisable to begin weaning kids/lambs when they are consuming over 1L of milk replacer a day. Initially start by reducing frequency of feeds to twice a day and monitor chaff and pellet intake. If at any time your lamb/kid appears bloated or distended following a feed, it is time to wean.

Replace milk feeds gradually by substituting a milk with 250-300mL warm water starting with one feed a day. **DO NOT DILUTE MILK REPLACER!!** The benefit of providing water during the weaning process ensures the kid/lamb is drinking water and prevents screaming for milk. Kids and lambs will eventually lose interest in the bottle filled with water (since it doesn't taste yummy) and vocalize less.

D. HEALTH

Dehorning:

Removing horns from goats is a common practice. Goats use their horns to fend off predators and to show dominance. If you will be keeping your goat kid as a pet, we recommend dehorning to reduce risk of injury to children and other animals. If you let your goats roam in paddocks, we recommend leaving the horns intact. Some breeds of goats are not commonly dehorned, e.g. Boer, Angora. If you chose to dehorn your goat kid, this needs to be done in the first 7 days of life well before the horn bud begins erupting through the skin. Delaying dehorning is strongly discouraged as it requires major surgery and considerable follow-up care.

Hand Rearing Goat Kids and Lambs

Tail Docking of Lambs:

Lambs should have their tails docked by 4-6 weeks of age (or sooner) to prevent excess build up of faeces under the tail and flystrike. Contact the LVS for pricing and booking a consultation.

Castration

Male goat kids and lambs can be castrated at any time. Intact billy (male) goats have a very strong and distinct smell that is only attractive to a nanny (female) goat. Unless you are choosing to keep your kid or lamb for breeding purposes, we recommend castrating at the time of de-horning or tail docking.

Vaccinations/Worming

It is recommended that lambs and kids be vaccinated at 4-6 weeks of age with 5-in-1 (UltraVac 5-in-1 or equivalent) and receive a booster 4 weeks later, then annually thereafter. The vaccine can be purchase from the LVS or at your local stock and feed store.

Worming/Drenching of kids and lambs should be considered at 6-8 weeks at age. We recommend performing regular faecal egg counts to determine worm burden. The LVS staff can provide further advise on parasite control and drenching programs.

E. VETERINARY CARE & EMERGENCIES

COLLAPSE/LETHARGY

If your kid or lamb becomes lethargic, refuses to drink/eat, collapses or is unable to stand, seek veterinary attention immediately.

TEETH GRINDING

If your kid/lamb begins to grind his/her teeth and/or stops feeding, there is a possibility that he/she has developed an ulcer. It is very important to seek veterinary advise if this occurs.

BLOATING

Bloating can be a serious and life-threatening problem when excess gas accumulates in the rumen (stomach) of your lamb or kid. Please contact your veterinarian immediately if your kid/lamb becomes bloated and has difficulty breathing or is unable to stand.

DIARRHOEA

It is not uncommon for kids/lambs to suffer from diarrhoea or scours. If your lamb or kid is bright and continues to drink milk and eat, providing oral electrolytes, eg, Vytrate, Lactaid, Bovolyte, between milk feds is recommended. If your kid/lamb becomes lethargic, refuses to suckle or stand at any time, please contact your veterinarian immediately.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Livestock Veterinary Services at the University of Sydney Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Camden on 02-4655-0777.