

An Overview of Kidding Season Health Issues

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Kidding season is the time of new life, but it also brings a full set of health issues to challenge your does and their newborn kids. Now is the time to start thinking of ways to minimize these risks and preparing to treat the ones you can't avoid.

Pregnancy toxemia is a condition that affects does in the last month of pregnancy. Does that are carrying twins or triplets are more susceptible, as are does that are too fat or too thin. It is fairly common in does that are confined but much rarer in does that are outdoors foraging and getting plenty of exercise. In this syndrome the pregnant uterus and/or internal body fat takes up space in the abdomen needed by the rumen for adequate food intake. The result is a deficiency of energy. In order to correct this deficiency the animal starts to metabolize body fat and toxic ketones are produced as a byproduct. The doe is paralyzed and unable to stand or to deliver her kids. Oral administration of high energy products such as corn syrup can help, but the issue can't be resolved until the kids are delivered, often by C-section. This condition is usually fatal unless veterinary intervention is provided early in the course of the problem. It can be almost completely prevented by allowing pregnant goats access to pasture and feeding a pound of whole corn per head per day during the last month of the pregnancy.

Domestic animals, goats included, are born with no immune protection against disease and must get their protection from the mother's first milk, or colostrum, within the first few hours of life. During the last few weeks of the pregnancy the mother stores immune-proteins in her first milk. These complex molecules can be absorbed whole in the newborn, but within a few hours after birth the gut undergoes changes which require them to be broken down to be absorbed. This renders them useless in disease prevention. Young animals that don't receive adequate colostrum soon after birth are much more likely to contract diarrhea or pneumonia. If they do not succumb to these problems they will likely be poor does throughout life. You can harvest colostrum from a doe that loses her kids before they nurse, or a doe with a single kid. After straining it to remove any foreign material, freeze the colostrum in an ice cube tray and then store the frozen colostrum cubes in Ziploc bags. In this way colostrum can be stored for at least a year. When needed for an orphan or a kid whose mother doesn't have adequate colostrum, thaw a cube at room temperature (do not microwave) and give it as soon after birth as possible. If the kid doesn't have a strong nursing reflex, administer it via stomach tube. (For detailed instructions with pictures showing how to do this easily and safely, see the February 2009 issue of *Goat Rancher*.) Repeat every two hours for the first 12 hours of life.

Most breeders think of losses due to hypothermia on frigid winter nights, but they can just as easily occur on a 60 degree spring afternoon. Neonatal hypothermia is more doe maternal trait related than it is weather related. Neonates do not have the ability to control their body temperature, so if the mother doesn't get them up and moving and get a warm meal into them; the ground simply draws the body heat out of the newborn. You might relate this to sleeping in a waterbed with no heater. It's not

bad at first but as your body heat is transferred; your body temperature drops until you wake up miserable. The best prevention for this is to cull the does that are not good mothers, and save replacement females from those who are. You can assess the temperature of a newborn with a thermometer, or more simply, place your finger in the kid's mouth. If he is colder than you are, he is too cold. If you find cold babies drastic action is required immediately. A dose of colostrum warmed in a hot water bath will help to bring up the kids core temperature. Because hypothermia takes away the suckling reflex this will probably need to be administered via stomach tube. Immerse the kid in warm water for several minutes until his temperature starts to come up, and then dry him thoroughly with a hair dryer. A heating pad covered with an old towel in a box or crate makes a good nursery until the kid is better able to control his body temperature.

In neonatal acidosis, often called "floppy kid syndrome", the kids are fine and active for several days then at about 3 to 5 days of age become flaccid and go down. Respiration is rapid and shallow and they are extremely depressed and nonresponsive. This condition occurs when the kid's appetite increases as the doe's milk production starts to peak. The kid eats too much at one meal and acidosis occurs. Treatment is very simple and quite effective if started early. Dissolve 1 teaspoon of sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) in 4 fluid ounces of water. Give one ounce (30cc) via stomach tube every 2 hours until the kid has returned to normal, usually 2 or 3 doses. Like so many other problems, this is more often encountered in confined does. Does on pasture can more readily move away from the kids and control how much the kids consume at each feeding.

White muscle disease is often similar in appearance to acidosis, but it differs in two regards. The kids are down or weak from birth, and although unable to stand they are bright and alert. This condition is due to a deficiency of Vitamin E and/or Selenium. It is only a problem in areas where the soils, and subsequently the forages, are deficient in these nutrients. If this is a problem in your area supplementation with Vitamin E and Selenium in the does prior to kidding can help and supplementation of the newborns soon after birth is also indicated.

Neonatal diarrhea can occur a few days or a few weeks after birth, depending on the causative organism. Several factors are important in minimizing this problem. Adequate and timely colostrum intake is crucial. Sanitation is often difficult in the wet months of winter and spring but it also plays a major role. Kids pick up the organisms from fecal contamination of the bedding area or their mother udder. Affected kids often die due to dehydration or systemic infection. It is important to replace fluid losses with electrolyte solutions. Oral antibiotics may be needed, but there are very few antibiotics labeled for use in goats. Check with your veterinarian for extra-label use of antibiotics that have their action in the gut. Dr. Randall Berrier, of Colorado Serum Company, tells me that their product, Bova Sera, when administered to newborns supplies passive immunity, much like colostrum, against the common organisms that cause diarrhea. This is valuable when the environmental exposure overwhelms the kid's natural protection. Since it is manufactured from bovine serum, there is a risk of shock when the product is used in goats, but according to Dr. Berrier, the risk is very minimal. If your farm has a history of scours in kids, this may be a good option for you to discuss with your local veterinarian.

Dystocia is difficult birth. Although it is a major problem in other livestock, it is not very common in goats. When it does occur it is usually associated with deformed fetuses or multiple kids that become tangled in the birth canal. Spending time observing your goats as they approach kidding will help you to become familiar with the normal course of events . Only when you know what is normal can you determine what is abnormal. Sometimes a small, soapy hand can help things along if needed. If this doesn't rectify the problem don't delay in calling an experienced helper or your veterinarian. The longer a dystocia is allowed to continue the poorer the chances of a happy outcome.

Birth season should be the high point of any stockman's year. It is also one of the most intense times in terms of health related challenges. Be sure to pay close attention to nutrition, sanitation, and have colostrum and a stomach tube handy. Prepare for health issues before they strike so you can enjoy lots of healthy kids having fun in the sun later.