

## A GUIDE TO BIRTHING

The gestation period is normally 5 months less one week. Signs that the female is in heat is the continuously wagging of the tail and I can only describe as a very vocal noisy sound as if hungry and calling for food.

So, the first time the puck is introduced to a female that is in heat, she will normally be in heat for 3 days. If successful, then she will birth within the above stated time. If not, then she will come into heat again approximately 21 days later. Most good and proven pucks will do the deed the first time around.

Firstly, lets talk about females that have kidded before with no problems. As time goes by and the 5 months are approaching, then certain signs are there for you to look out for. She will show signs of restlessness and will start scratching at the ground. She may go off her food and appear to want to be on her own. She will show a whitish/yellowish snotty mucus discharge from her vagina. This is the first real sign that the female is in labour. At this stage, I am watching all the time. I then have what I call my basic birthing tools. At least two freshly laundered towels. Iodine solution. Bailing twine or thin rope. Bowl of hot or medium hot water. (birthing tools will be explained as we progress the birthing procedure).

Each female is different. Some birth without much fuss and noise and then some birth loudly and scream. Much like us humans when we birth.

In most cases when she is ready and the mucus discharge increases, she will normally lay on her side. she will then start to pant and push. The first showing of the kid should be a nose and one of the front feet. The nose/head will be covered in the birthing sac. As she pushes, then the head and front foot will push out more. The foot normally tears at the sac and breaks it. she will then push out the kid and the sac will be break and the kid will shake its head and breathe. The umbilical cord will come away naturally on birth

If the head is still covered with the birthing sac, then break it immediately with your finger so the kid does not suffocate. Another good trick is to have a piece of straw on hand to stick gently up the kid's nostrils. This little trick works every time. Most Females that have birthed before do so within an hour of showing the mucus discharge but on occasions the labour can be much longer.

If she is pushing for a long time and you do not feel confident to put your hand inside, as you may need to turn the kid, then find someone close by. Sheep farmers are very experienced. But if in doubt then call your vet. Once she has birthed then she will not hesitate to start licking the kid and be very attentive and after a short period will nudge the kid to her teat for the most important drink of the kid's life. The first milk contains the colostrum which contains natural anti-bodies. If she is reluctant to nurse or take much notice of her new born, then it is more than likely she is having another kid. A good sign to look for is that after she has birthed, then a bubble-like sac, bloodish in colour will hang down from her vagina. That indicates that the after birth is coming away. No sign of the sac, then she is not finished and may have another kid or two. Triplets do happen. NEVER ATTEMPT TO PULL AT THE AFTER-BIRTH. Once the after-birth has come away, I remove it so that she does not attempt to eat it. She may choke.

For a first-time mum, then things may not go to plan. However, in my experience most will birth without any problems. She will not have knowledge of the pain and can be quite traumatized after the birth. Especially if her first time produces twins. The thing(s) that has caused her pain is laying on the ground wanting her attention. Thus, the towel. A gentle rub of the kid(s) to stimulate and start the drying process. Also, much appreciated on drying one's own hands. You may have to encourage her to start the licking process. She will soon be happy to do this and again gently nudge the kid to her teats for the important drink. On the rare occasion, whether an experienced mum or not. The milk may not flow naturally. Colostrum is very yellowish and thick, and you may need to stimulate to start the flow. I always have warm water at the birth and with warm hands, gently squeeze the teat with two fingers pushing towards the big udder. The milk will then come. I do this to both teats. As previously mentioned, guide the kid to her udder and squeeze a few drops of milk onto the kid's nose. The kid will then get the smell and look for the teat. Sometimes you may have to put the kid directly onto the teat.

I always leave mum and kid alone once I know everything is okay for about 20 minutes. The kid will be nearly dry then and it is wonderful to see the colouring without all the slime. I mentioned Iodine as part of the birthing kit. Once the kid has suckled and settled, and mum has had a refreshing drink of water, then pick up the kid and spray iodine on the remaining cord. This helps to stop infection.

I did mention at the beginning about baling twine or thin rope. On one occasion, one of my girls was struggling to deliver. The kid's head and foot were coming but I was quite shocked to see the size of the head and foot. It was a big kid. Lucky for me, my neighbour who is an experienced sheep farmer was on hand and together we managed to get the twine on the kid's foot and with me holding and guiding the head out, my neighbour gently pulled the foot out with the twine. Massive big kid.

Birth time is always a worrying time whether you are experienced or not. The joy of seeing new life coming into this world is wonderful and all the sleepless nights you have waiting for the birth. TRUST ME IT IS WORTH IT.

I hope this guide is helpful to you. Elaine