



## Healthy Kids from Birth to Weaning: Set Them Up for a Lifetime of Profitability

The Ontario goat industry is in a growth phase. Many producers want to expand their herds, but quality does are in short supply. One solution to this problem is to ensure each and every doe born in your herd grows into a productive member of the herd. With some farms experiencing kid mortality rates of up to 50 per cent, it is not hard to see the benefit of reducing kid mortality to improve the profitability of your herd.

Drs. Rex Crawford and Chris Buschbeck, members of Small Ruminant Veterinarians of Ontario, spoke to Woodstock and Listowel-area, producers at Ontario Goat's 2016 Profitability workshops on October 11 and 12, respectively, about managing kids from birth to weaning to prevent and treat disease.

They noted that producers should focus on preventing common kid diseases by ensuring kidding and neonatal best management practices are followed for every kidding. This includes ensuring housing is clean and dry as well as providing all kids with enough high quality colostrum.

### Digestive problems

Diarrhea is a common ailment for kids. Usually the best treatment is to keep the kids hydrated – providing electrolytes multiple times a day **in addition to**, but not at the same time as, milk meals. The milk provides energy and nutrients that are essential to help fight disease, so continue to offer it on the usual schedule. Antibiotics and pain medication can also be a helpful treatment, depending on the cause of the diarrhea. Pain medications can help encourage kids to get up to eat and drink, allowing them to stay hydrated and speeding recovery. Pain medications can have more severe side effects when used in dehydrated kids, so be sure to follow the prescription. Work with your herd veterinarian to develop treatment protocols for each cause of diarrhea to ensure you are using the “right drug for the bug”

Diarrhea can be tricky to treat as it can have multiple causes. However, the age at onset is a good clue to help determine the cause. Drs Crawford and Buschbeck outlined three common causes of diarrhea in kids and emphasized the importance of working with your veterinarian to create treatment plans for each cause.

- *E. Coli* will typically infect kids in the first three days of life. Kids with *E. Coli* can become dehydrated and toxic very quickly. This makes recognizing and treating kids with *E. Coli* as early as possible essential to ensuring survival. Electrolytes, antibiotics and pain medication may be needed.

- *Cryptosporidium (Crypto)* will cause diarrhea in kids from five to 15 days of age, and usually causes an outbreak in group housed kids. *Crypto* prevents kids from absorbing nutrients in the small intestine, leading to diarrhea, weight loss, and pain. An anti-protozoal, administered before kids begin scouring, may be a useful preventative management tool. However, kids can be easily overdosed, so following your herd veterinarian's prescription exactly is very important. Once kids contract *Crypto*, an anti-protozoal may be a useful treatment when combined with electrolytes.
- *Coccidiosis (Cocci)* usually occurs in kids three weeks of age or older. Kids will have diarrhea and weight loss but still appear bright and responsive. *Cocci* is caused by a pathogen that builds up in the environment and normally infects kids two to three weeks before symptoms appear. Coccidiostats can be used in milk replacer and may help prevent outbreaks.

*E. Coli*, *Crypto*, and *Cocci* are all transmitted by ingesting infected manure. Thorough cleaning of housing and feeding equipment can go a long way in preventing these common causes of diarrhea. Keeping kids in groups with a narrow age range and disinfecting housing between groups will also help prevent infection.

Drs. Crawford and Buschbeck added that Enterotoxemia may have symptoms that include diarrhea and bloat, but often causes a sudden death with few other symptoms. As such, it is difficult to identify and treat. However, prevention can be relatively simple. Vaccination of all adult animals, including pregnant does and kids, is highly recommended. Adult does that are “poor doers” or have diarrhea may also be suffering from enterotoxemia. Vaccination prevents lost productivity in does while also reducing the chance kids will become sick. Keeping milk feeding consistent – weighing the powder, mixing well, and ensuring the temperature is appropriate at feeding time as well as delivering milk on a regular schedule can help prevent this disease. Further, avoid feeding kids too much at one time. Spreading the milk amount over many feedings or allowing ad libitum (free choice) feeding can also help reduce the risk of enterotoxemia.

### Joint problems

“Joint ill can cause severe lameness in kids one to four weeks of age,” Dr. Buschbeck added. The joints may be hot, swollen, and painful. Joint ill is caused by bacteria entering the blood stream (most often from the navel). The bacteria spread infection around the body, finally settling in

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the joints. Once there, it is very difficult to get antibiotics into the joint to kill the bacteria. This leads to a prolonged treatment and recovery time, which can set kids back significantly. Prevention by ensuring a clean environment and regularly dipping the navel in a disinfection solution are the best approach.

### Respiratory problems

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that can cause coughing, nasal discharge, rapid breathing, lethargy, and death. “If they are not joining in the reindeer games, there's something wrong,” said Dr. Buschbeck, referring to the common “kid races,” where everyone runs in one direction. If a kid is following slowly, not playing, or not jumping when others are, take a closer look at them, as they may be sick. Air quality and ventilation at kid nose level have an important impact on pneumonia rates. Ensuring kids are not crowded is also great prevention. Many bacteria can cause pneumonia, so it is especially important to work with your herd veterinarian to determine the best treatment, which may include antibiotics, painkillers, and/or steroids.


### Summary

“Prevention is a lot better than treatment,” concluded Dr. Buschbeck. Work with your herd veterinarian to identify diseases that are present in kids. Early diagnosis and treatment will help reduce the impact of the disease on lifelong production, but determining why the kid got sick

and what you can do to prevent other kids from contracting the same disease is the best way to improve the profitability of your herd. ■

For more on kid management, see Ontario Goat's “Best management practices for commercial goat production” booklet series.





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