

A Slip and a Miss

By Maggie Leman

Many things cause abortions, but it is usually a bacterial, protozoan or viral infection. Goats do not often abort from being rammed or falling. The fetuses are very well protected internally with the bony pelvis, muscular uterus, and several fluid-filled shock-absorbing sacs that surround them.

The most common cause of abortion in goats is a uterine infection by the chlamydia psittaci bacteria, the condition is called Chlamydiosis. Chlamydia bacteria also cause most cases of pinkeye, but a herd with pinkeye is not very prone to developing the abortive form of Chlamydiosis. An aborted fetus and placental tissues can be tested to confirm this cause. To help stop further abortions, called an abortion storm when several does in the same herd abort, you can give oxytetracycline (LA 200 is one brand) at 1 cc per 30 pounds to all bred does and all bucks by SQ injection every other day for 3 treatments. Chlamydiosis is a sexually transmitted disease; your bucks can carry it, which is why you treat the bucks too. If you continue to have a problem with Chlamydiosis in future kiddings using the chlamydia vaccine for sheep may be helpful. The vaccine will not help prevent pinkeye caused by chlamydia. While it is unlikely that a herd with pinkeye will subsequently develop the abortive form of Chlamydiosis, it is something to consider if your does are in late gestation, you can give a round of oxytetracycline (Trade names: LA 200, Biomycin 200, Agrimycin 200) injections to help cure the pinkeye and help prevent abortion, two birds with one stone, so to speak.

Toxoplasmosis, infection by the protozoan toxoplasma gondii, is another cause of later term abortion. This protozoan can infect most warm-blooded animals (including human) but the primary carriers are cats. Cats get it from eating infected rodents, infected placentas and infected raw meat scraps. Soon after the initial infection the cats shed infective oocysts in their feces for 3 to about 19 days. Kittens are more likely to shed oocysts than adult cats, as the most shedding is done right after the initial infection. Most adult outdoor cats have already gone through the initial infection and are not shedding oocysts. These oocysts are fairly hardy and can live in moist cool areas for up to 18 months. Barn cats who use the stored hay as a litter box or who have litters of kittens in the hay barn are most likely to spread this disease to your pregnant does. If the doe is pregnant at the time of initial infection the protozoan invades the fetuses about 2 weeks later. Fetuses infected in early stages of pregnancy are more likely to die than fetuses infected in late stages. Sometimes abortion happens in the following pregnancy, but previously infected goats do not usually abort. A blood test of a doe that has aborted may help diagnose Toxoplasmosis. There is no real effective treatment for Toxoplasmosis either; prevention is the key. Lock up your hay storage shed; do not empty your cat's litter box anywhere where the goats may be exposed to the feces. Spaying and neutering your barn cats may help control toxoplasmosis on your farm.

Chlamydiosis and Toxoplasmosis are the two most common infective causes of abortion in goats. Other diseases that may cause abortion are Listeriosis and Q-Fever. For Q-Fever the symptoms and treatment are much the same as for Chlamydiosis. A goat that becomes ill from other causes, such as pneumonia, and runs a high fever may also abort. A high fever causes the release of prostaglandin, which can terminate a pregnancy. Stress itself can cause the release of prostaglandin. It is inadvisable to move a goat to a new farm or to take her to a show in late gestation.

Some dewormers and drugs have been implicated in causing abortion and birth defects. Levamisol (Levasole, Tramisol) has been implicated in the causing abortion and should not be used during pregnancy. Albendazole (Valbazen) has been implicated in causing birth defects when given to goats during the first 45 days of pregnancy. Dexamethazone (Azium), a steroid used to treat inflammation causes abortion, so much so it is often used for this purpose.

A heavy parasite load, poor nutrition and mineral deficiency can cause abortion or the birth of stillborn kids or dying kids. Copper, selenium and iodine deficiencies are the implicated in abortions caused by a deficient diet. Fetuses and does may be blood or tissue tested to help confirm these. Copper deficiency causes enzootic ataxia, a severe weakness and lack of control in the rear legs and enzootic swayback; both of these conditions are fatal. Selenium deficiency causes white muscle disease, a nutritional form of muscular dystrophy that can affect all the muscles in the body including the heart muscle. Iodine deficient kids are born underdeveloped and with goiters, they may be born dead or die shortly after birth. All of these deficiencies can cause abortion during any stage of gestation in the doe. This is why I try to emphasize that good mineral supplementation is so very important to a successful breeding program!