



Snowhill Alpacas

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BASIC GUIDE TO ALPACA HUSBANDRY

The following information is based upon our 17 years of experience in keeping and breeding alpacas. As there are no officially approved treatments for Camelids, we cannot be responsible for adverse effects resulting from any of the treatments that we recommend. However, we have successfully used these treatments in the quantities suggested:-

FEED

We use a mixture of whole mix (crushed grains/molasses etc) formulated for Alpacas and Llamas (Heygates and Carr's Billington produce this type of feed), pelleted feed (Aztec Silver from GLW or GWF's Fibregest) and a low protein Alf-Alfa or Molichaff (can be purchased at any feed supplier). We mix this in the proportions of 1/3rd whole mix, 1/3rd pellets and 1/3rd chaff. You may wish to add small amounts of Camelibra (from GWF) during winter and/or when females have cria at foot and are pregnant. GWF also produce some specific feed supplements for pregnant/lactating dams and cria.

Adult Males and open Adult Females without cria at foot: 2 large handfuls of the above per alpaca once per day. Try to place feed in separate bowls, a few paces apart, so that each alpaca has its correct amount. Ideally, use troughs (or 5" guttering) placed two to two and half feet off the ground on a fence or fixed to the wall of the barn or field shelter. If always fed in the barn or shelter, they will always be easy to catch for treatments, toe nail clipping and putting on the halter.

Pregnant Females and Lactating Females: as above but, twice per day.

Weanlings up to 18 months: as for pregnant females.

During very cold periods, you might wish to increase the quantity/frequency of feed. However, if the alpacas start to become too fat, reduce the amounts. Unless there is plenty of grass, alpacas should have access to hay or haylage at all times, particularly during the winter months when there's little nutrition in the grass. During the winter, you can also try them on cut dried grass (again, there are many suppliers of this product). Clean water must be available at all times.

SHELTER

Ideally, alpacas need to have access to shelter – particularly during wet cold periods. Alpacas can tolerate very low temperatures if it is dry cold. However, they are susceptible to hypothermia and subsequent pneumonia and possible death if left out in cold, wet and windy conditions (their fleece will keep wet out up to a point but, as there is almost no lanolin in the fleece, the wet will eventually get to the skin). To a great extent, your local environment will dictate the amount of shelter required. During the summer months (particularly just prior to shearing) they should be able to have access to shade. Alpacas can be successfully housed indoors during winter, provided that they are put out for some exercise at least once or twice a week and that the barn provides sufficient space so that they are not on top of each other. Keep males separate from females.

FENCING

Four foot post and rail is ideal. Alternatively, standard stock fencing will do. Do not use barbed wire. Unlike sheep or goats, alpacas will rarely challenge a fence – although, they will find and go through any gaps very quickly!

REQUIRED TREATMENTS

Vaccines

At least once a year and preferably twice a year (and no more than 12 months after the previous), inject all alpacas with a clostridial vaccine. There are a number of these available from “country/farmers stores” and include:- Heptovac +P, Lambivac, Covexin 8 and Covexin 10. Which one you use is not all that important unless your vet informs you that you need to use a particular one (this might be because he/she is aware of a particular clostridial strain in your area).

The quantity to be given is 2ml per alpaca (regardless of alpaca weight).

Cria should be given one injection at about 4 weeks and another 4 to 6 weeks later. This should be done for any older alpacas if more than 12 months have passed since they were previously vaccinated. This, also applies if you are changing from Lambivac to Covexin 10, for instance (however, it is not necessary if going from Covexin 10 to any of the other three, as they protect against fewer pathogens all of which were covered by Covexin 10 except for pasturella (the P of Heptovac)). We generally feel that Heptovac is best one to use unless you know that you have some of the more rare clostridial strains (then go for Covexin 10).

Other vaccines are not currently required. However, keep an eye/ear open for any changes (such as a return of bluetongue).

Wormers/Mite Control

It is advisable to have a faecal egg count done on the herd at least once a year. Your vet can do this for you. If you only have a few alpacas, collect dung samples from each animal and place in a separate bag marked with it's name.

The most common internal parasites are **worms**, coccidia (single celled gut parasites) and fluke. Most Ivermectin containing drugs will deal with worms and, at the same time, will reduce any mite or flea problems. We generally use Ivomec Super (1ml per 10 kg weight of animal) or Dectomax (0.5ml to 0.7ml per 10 kg weight) or Cydectin OR Cydectin LA (long acting) (0.4ml to 0.5ml per 10 kg weight). A cheaper alternative to Ivomec and Dectomax is Bimectin. Bimectin seems to be as effective against mites as the others and we would recommend it if using more frequently to treat mite issues (dosage same as for Ivomec). All of these treatments can be injected subcutaneously (below the skin). Alternatively, Dectomax can be injected intramuscularly (however, this should only be done in the rump area). We normally inject subcutaneously. There are drenches, such as Panacur, which can be administered by mouth. However, be aware that there is increasing resistance to some treatments – so try other products if necessary. Although not always recommended by vets, we usually treat for worms at least three times a year (in part, this is to keep mites under control). If you are aware of there being Haemonchus Contortus (common name is **Barbers Pole**) worm in the herd/in the pasture, use Cydectin at a dosage of at least 1.5 times the quantity suggested for sheep. As a last resort (if you have worms that seem to be immune to all other products) use Closamectin.

Mites can be treated with the same Ivermectin based products as described above. Again, sometimes you will find that you need to do more than just the injections. Frontline spray is good (although expensive) as are other similar sprays. An alternative is to mix Ivomec or Bimectin into pig oil and massage this into any bare/crusty skin on a regular basis until the hair regrows. If you are not too concerned with staining the fleece, there are many pour-on products that can be used (best done shortly after shearing). Paramectin and Eprizero pour on treatments are quite good and are not too oily – so don't stain the fleece. Camrosa balm or "Pink Clay" will assist hair regrowth if applied to bare skin every other day. Other products, such as Castor Oil and Zinc cream, E45/E45 anti-itch are also worth trying.

Other treatments that may be required

Coccidia are usually only a problem with young alpacas and alpacas that have a compromised immune system (a result of old age, other illness, poor nutrition, stress caused by being moved to a different farm etc).

Young alpacas/cria haven't developed such an extensive immunity as adults and are more likely to get coccidiosis. Symptoms vary but, include diarrhoea, constipation, heavy breathing and listlessness – sometimes there are no obvious symptoms. This parasite can be fatal if the infestation is heavy and is left untreated. Use Vecoxan or Dycoxon drench (2.5%) giving 10ml per 10 kg weight. With alpacas, it is usually better to administer at a slightly higher rate than that indicated for sheep. If you know that you have coccidia on the farm, it is sensible to treat all cria after weaning and a month later. Before that keep an eye on all cria for any signs of coccidiosis, particularly those you know may not have had a good start, and treat as necessary.

For a particularly difficult strain of coccidia (Emac), you might need to use Baycox drench. However, this should be administered at the levels advised for sheep and not more than that as it is more toxic than vecoxan or dycoxon.

Liver Fluke is a parasite that is normally only an issue on ground that is frequently wet. The fluke requires a water snail during its lifecycle. However, there have been incidences of this parasite on surprisingly dry ground. Faecal samples will normally pick up signs of

fluke. There are a number of treatments on the market; however, Fasinex drench seems to work well.

There are other conditions and some of these are covered on our website. If in doubt, get in touch with your vet or phone/email me or, there are welfare members listed on the British Alpaca Society website.

On the whole, especially if you have a small number of alpacas, you will only need to treat for worms and mites plus, of course vaccinate against clostridial infection.

Other husbandry tasks

Toe nails will need trimming up to four times a year. Alpacas have two toes on each foot and each toe has a nail. The nails should be trimmed flat in line with the soft pad of the foot. Light coloured toe nails grow faster than dark ones, so you might get away with trimming dark toes only twice a year.

Shearing. All huacaya alpacas should be sheared at least once every year. Suri alpacas can be sheared every year or every other year. Only use experienced alpaca shearers. Sheep shearers, who haven't been trained to shear alpacas, will be no good at all and will probably leave your alpacas covered in cuts.

Teeth. Ask your shearer to check the incisors and fighting teeth (males) and trim as necessary. Alpacas do not have a top set of incisors but, have a hard palate against which the bottom set cut grass. In their native Andes, alpacas are wearing their teeth whilst getting lichen and such like off rocks, also, the soil is highly abrasive – they rarely have this opportunity in the UK and therefore their incisors may grow too long. Fighting teeth are usually only an issue with males (although older females will develop small versions) and normally erupt at about 3 years old. Again, ask your shearer to either file these down or cut the sharp tips off. If left, they can cause considerable damage to other male alpacas. (Fighting teeth need to be checked yearly. This applies to castrates as well, as many of them still grow fighting teeth).

Vitamins. Coming from the high Andes, Alpacas have developed a naturally high UV resistance. In the UK this isn't needed, but it means that they have difficulty in making enough vitamin D during our winters. Adults can usually absorb enough from the vitamin enhanced alpaca hard feeds, however, cria, growing alpacas and pregnant females will need either A,D and E vitamin injections or A, D and E oral paste supplements (otherwise, there's a danger of rickets). There's also strong evidence that good levels of vitamin D enhance the immune system. There are several chaff feeds that have added vitamin D and minerals (such as Selenium) which can be added to the standard alpaca feed.

Antibiotics. These should generally only be given when clearly necessary. There are several antibiotics that seem to work well in alpacas and a few that don't. It also depends on what type of bacterial infection one is dealing with. Penicillin, Tetracycline and brand

names Betamox, Nuflor, Engemycin (have known one alpaca die due to an adverse reaction to Engemycin but that is a rare reaction), Excenel and Baytril for example are all okay and “safe” to use. **DO NOT USE** Tilmicosin (Micotil) based products as these are not safe to use in alpacas. Also, it’s probably best to avoid Pencillin/Streptomycin combination products as the maximum safe dosage of Streptomycin for an alpaca means that the Penicillin element is under-dosed – so may lead to penicillin resistance in the bacteria being treated against.

Use Streptomycin and Penicillin separately.

It’s always best practice to consult with your vet before using these products.

The dosage levels we use, for most of the treatments mentioned above (not antibiotics, vaccines or Baycox), will be higher than those recommended for sheep. We have found that 1.5 times to twice the sheep dosage is sometimes required and has no ill effects. As a rule, it is usually best to apply slightly more than too little.

Other possible issues

COLIC. Alpacas can get colic, although it is thankfully quite rare, as in horses, it is a serious condition that needs immediate treatment. The alpaca will usually be in the cush position or on it’s side and will be reluctant to get up. It will often be grunting (from pain) or in extreme cases, kicking. It is best to call the vet and explain that you think its colic – they should treat this as a priority emergency. If you have any available, give the alpaca Metacam (a painkiller and anti-inflammatory) and Buscopan (a muscle relaxant and a mild anti-inflammatory) as soon as you suspect the symptoms of colic. A severe case of colic will kill the alpaca within two to four hours if untreated. Colic is usually caused by a twisting of the gut – probably due to over enthusiastic rolling. We have only lost a handful of alpacas from colic over the years but, have successfully treated a dozen or so. The few that died usually got colic late at night/very early hours of the morning – so were not spotted until too late. As I say, it is rare – so don’t have sleepless nights.

Bovine TB. Alpacas, like most mammals, can get TB. If you know that you have TB infected badgers in your area, we would recommend that you install electric fencing (ideally four strands of electrified wire around the perimeter of the paddocks – generally only needs to be on from dusk to dawn) and put badger proof mesh on all perimeter gates with a solid base under the gate (to deter the badgers from digging under). Alternatively (to electric fencing), you can use badger deterrent stock fencing buried into the ground around the base of the perimeter fence. Most alpaca owners have never had TB in their herds, even without these types of fencing. However, for the few that do get it, it is not easy to control and is upsetting as there is no cure and all alpacas testing positive have to be culled.

Foot and Mouth. There is no evidence that Alpacas can contract this disease (neither do horses nor donkeys). They are not cloven hooved animals but, are two toed animals. Some that were in the epicentre of the last outbreak were culled along with everything else. On testing, all were found to be negative for the disease and the owners successfully claimed full compensation from the government – so, hopefully, the government won’t do that again!

