

Thirteen potential risk factors for

Vaginal prolapse

A vaginal prolapse is when the vagina is pushed outside the vulva. It appears as a smooth, red mass, varying in size from a tennis ball to a melon. It usually occurs during the last few weeks of pregnancy. There is no single cause of vaginal prolapse; however, many factors may increase the risk of it occurring.

- 1) **Age:** more common in older females
- 2) **Breed:** more common in highly-prolific breeds
- 3) **Estrogen:** hay/pasture containing a high percentage of alfalfa or other legumes may increase incidence
- 4) **Exercise:** too much or too little
- 5) **Genetics:** has a genetic component. Don't keep offspring from dams that prolapse.
- 6) **Gravity:** facing uphill while lying down or standing on hind legs to eat
- 7) **History:** females that prolapse once are more likely to do it again (35-40% chance)*
- 8) **Housing:** insufficient feeder space and loafing area
- 9) **Litter size:** more common with females carrying twins (5x) and triplets (11-12x)*
- 10) **Nutrition:** poor quality hay, too much concentrate, poor feeding practices all contribute to risk
- 11) **Obesity:** excessive body condition and abdominal fat
- 12) **Shearing:** ewes sheared during pregnancy less likely to prolapse*
- 13) **Short tail docks:** docking may damage structures that support the pelvic girdle

* Epidemiology of vaginal prolapse in mixed-age ewes in New Zealand (New Zealand Veterinary Journal, 2014)



If a ewe or doe prolapses her vagina, the vagina needs to be hygienically reinserted as soon as possible. Delays in treatment can lead to worse problems. The vagina can usually be retained with a plastic retainer (spoon) and/or using a rope or ready-made prolapse harness. Females can usually lamb/kid successfully with these devices in place. Sometimes, a suture is needed to retain the prolapse and antibiotics are given. The suture must be removed prior to parturition.