

Legal requirements for common surgical operations on farm

With lambing and calving season upon us we would like to remind farmers of the legal requirement relating to routine surgical operations to livestock, such as castration, disbudding and tail docking on farms. (Standard 12e)

CATTLE

Operation	Method	Animal's Age	Operator	Anaesthetic
Castration	Elastration/ Rubber ring	1st week of life only	Competent stock person	
	Bloodless castration e.g. burdizzo	Up to 2 months	Competent stock person	
	When the animal is over 2 months of age or where any methods other than the above are used		Vet Only	With
Dehorning	Cutting/sawing horn (not to be used routinely)	Up to 5 months of age	Competent stock keeper	With
		Over 5 months of age	Vet Only	With
Disbudding	Chemical cauterisation	1 st week of life only	Competent stock person	
	Method other than above (eg hot iron)	Up to 2 months of age	Competent stock person	With
Removal of Supernumerary Teats	Using clean, sharp scissors	Up to 3 months	Competent stock person	With
		3 months and over	Vet Only	With

NB: Routine tail docking of cattle is not permitted

SHEEP

Operation	Method	Animal's Age	Operator	Anaesthetic
Castration	Elastration/ Rubber ring	1st week of life only	Competent stock person	
	Clamp/Bloodless	Up to 3 months	Competent stock person	
	When the animal is over 3 months of age or where any methods other than the above are used		Vet Only	With
Tail Docking	Rubber Ring	1st week of life	Competent stock person	
	Hot iron or clamp	Over 2 months	Veterinary Surgeon	With
	Surgical/Other	Any age	Vet Only	With
NB: Sufficient tail to cover the vulva (females) the anus (males) must be left. Any shorter than this must only be in the case of emergency, disease or injury following consultation with a Vet, and carried out with anaesthetic				
Dehorning and disbudding*	Trimming of the insensitive tip of an ingrowing horn	Any age	Competent stock person	
	All other cases	Any age	Vet only	With

*Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (as amended) only a vet may dehorn or disbud a sheep, apart from the trimming of the insensitive tip of an ingrowing horn, which if left untreated could cause pain or distress