



Legislation

The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007, the Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (Wales) Regulations 2007 and the Prohibited Procedures on Protected Animals (Exemptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2007 all include disbudding of goats as a procedure which can be carried out for non-therapeutic reasons. However, this secondary legislation is subject to the restrictions in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 and therefore disbudding of goats is restricted to veterinary surgeons.

The issues

Disbudding is a skilled procedure and should be carried out in such a way that any risk to the kid is minimised. Disbudding involves cauterisation of the horn buds with hot irons after cutting off the tip of the horn bud if these are well developed. This is usually carried out within the first seven days of life, as horn buds grow very rapidly.

There are a number of issues associated with the disbudding of goat kids, including the need to achieve an effective block of four nerves to desensitise the bud (compared to only two nerves in calves). This places a real risk of a toxic local anaesthetic overdose in a high-risk neonatal kid. The skull is also very thin, and, in addition, many conventional calf disbudding irons do not have a large enough head to remove the bud and surrounding germinative soft tissue effectively²

Legal Requirement: Only veterinary surgeons are permitted to carry out the disbudding procedure – which is considered veterinary surgery under the provisions of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. There are no exemptions.

Recommendation 1: Veterinary surgeons carrying out disbudding should be proficient in undertaking the procedure.

In a survey carried out by Goat Veterinary Society, of veterinary surgeons disbudding approximately 2000 kids in total per annum, no adverse reactions were reported in the routine use of analgesics⁷. However, as there are no analgesics licensed for use in goats in the UK, and no analgesics licensed for any animal of only a few days of age, the principles of the Cascade⁸ under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations (2013) should be applied when considering their use.

Recommendation 3: The principles of the Cascade should be applied when prescribing analgesics, and goat keepers advised of both the risks and benefits as part of the process of obtaining informed consent for the entire disbudding procedure

More information

[Goat Veterinary Society](#)

[Animal Welfare Foundation/Goat Veterinary Society 'Disbudding of goat kids' DVD](#)

⁷ Thirteen questionnaires were returned by veterinary members who between them disbud approximately 2065 kids annually (range 10 – 1000). All without exception were already using supplementary analgesia, mainly “large animal” Meloxicam 20mg/ml, and to a lesser extent “small animal” Meloxicam 5mg/ml. No recognisable adverse reactions were reported.

⁸ The Cascade: Prescribing unauthorised medicines <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-cascade-prescribing-unauthorised-medicines>