



noble beast farms alpacas

Tips for Shearing During COVID19

Shearing is upon us and suddenly we are all forced to consider how to best care for our animals during the time of the pandemic. Shearing IS essential, this is not an activity to put off for long; however the usual gatherings and potlucks have to be left behind in favour of a quieter, safer shearing experience. Even if you choose to shear a bit later than usual this year, I would suggest some basic precautions.

As a family physician working in Ontario, I worry about COVID19 every single day. I appreciate the dramatic effects this has had on farms, business, patients and friends.

Here are my suggestions for limiting risk during alpaca shearing:

- no symptomatic people attend
- limit attendance to the bare minimum numbers you need; people from household groups represent fewer chains of transmission if they are self-isolating
- people who are planning on shearing this month should continue to self-isolate as much as possible so as not to connect chains of transmission. #juststayhome
- spray down the shearing table or mat between animals with a 1:10 dilute bleach solution. Everyone touches the table, it is plastic and a bit damp - a good conductor of viruses from the surface
- try not to share clippers, scissors, markers or other small tools because you touch the handles. If possible keep one person to each job or have each participant bring a little trimming kit of their own; well-labelled of course
- no nose cuddles (sigh, the best part) with the alpaca on the mat - as mammals they can likely carry lots of diseases even if they don't get sick; usually I think of this as "immune boosting" but not this year! No one will likely ever test an alpaca so this is advice based on "an abundance of caution" and not science
- a really good hand-washing at every break
- physically distance during meals and snacks: 6-feet means sitting on opposite sides of the kitchen! It's pretty far.
- some extra bleach in the house for wiping down the guest bathroom, doorknobs and high-touch areas – last person in and out does a spritz of everything
- bags and fibre, are all low risk items and after a day or three of sitting in the barn or house, not likely to cause any problems
- NEVER TOUCH YOUR FACE – even if every surface was contaminated
- Dr. Teresa Tam said "treat your hands like you just chopped up jalepeno peppers and need to change a contact". Keep THAT in mind all day!

Should we wear masks?

Masks... well that is a bit of a loaded question.

Shearing can represent close quarters so there is some argument that a mask might help in preventing asymptomatic transmission between participants.

That being said, it is INCREDIBLY difficult to not touch and fiddle with a mask. In order for a mask to be helpful you have to put it on once; wear it all day and never touch it.

If you take it off, it should go in a designated container that you do not touch the outside of (Ziploc sandwich containers work well). I have a cloth mask for groceries and quite frankly, I have given up. Between it falling off my nose, pinching my ears and me occasionally stuffing it in my pocket, I end up touching my face dozens more times than I ever would. Maybe I am just too highly distractable!

If someone feels comfortable wearing a mask shearing, then absolutely, please go ahead. It is also a great idea to practice this at home for a few hours to see how you fare with not touching it. Many people are safer focusing on handwashing multiple times.

Remember, once you are in the barn and the same people are there, you aren't really introducing any new risks (unlike at the grocery store where many different people are coming and going) so if you rigorously wash your hands on your way to and from the barn and don't touch your face or share your tools, you have done the majority of protection right there.

Best wishes to everyone and their herds during this unusual year;

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