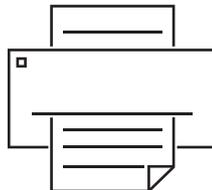


This guide has been developed by the Humane Slaughter Association, British Cattle Veterinary Association and Sheep Veterinary Society.



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# On-farm Humane Killing of Cattle & Sheep

As a livestock keeper, it is your legal duty to ensure that your livestock receive the highest standard of care and do not suffer unnecessarily. Unfortunately, livestock occasionally become sick or injured and difficult decisions must be made in the best interest of animal welfare. Sometimes the best form of treatment is humane euthanasia on welfare grounds. The actions

taken by the person responsible for the livestock is extremely important; doing nothing is **not** an option. Killing livestock on-farm can be distressing and is not a pleasant responsibility. This reference is intended to be a simple guide outlining how euthanasia should best be carried out to ensure humane destruction, within the scope of the law.

## Euthanasia must be:

**Undertaken by a competent, confident person; with relevant livestock knowledge and experience.**

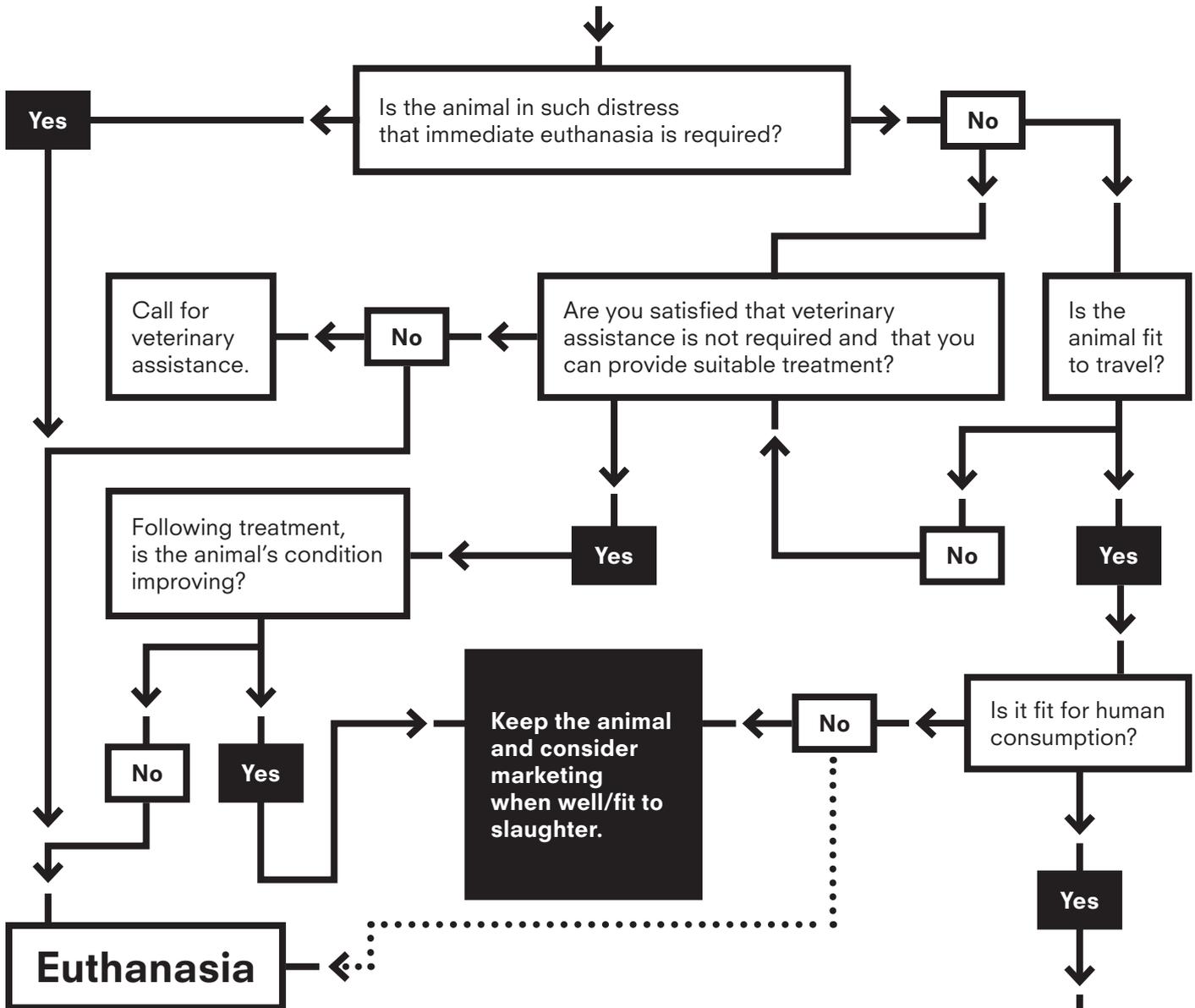
**Undertaken quickly: once the decision has been made it should be carried out without unnecessary delay to avoid suffering.**

**Effective: suitable methods must be used and checks must be made to ensure the method used was effective.**

If you require any additional guidance, contact your veterinary surgeon. For more detailed information on methods visit [www.hsa.org.uk](http://www.hsa.org.uk)



# Deciding the best course of action. When to Euthanase



In some longer term cases you may decide that due to welfare or other reasons an animal requires killing in its best interests. This is applicable to unmarketable calves, mal-formed neonates or animals that 'just aren't doing' and maybe haven't recovered from chronic illness. These livestock must still be cared for until the point of killing and then killed by a competent person.

In some cases animals not-fit to travel, may be slaughtered on-farm for human consumption. Before slaughtering you must contact your veterinary surgeon to discuss the correct procedure. There are limitations to certification meaning that only animals that have suffered recent accidents will be eligible. It is important to note that the animals must not be left to suffer unduly, and that some meat processors may not accept the carcass. Additional guidance is also available from the BCVA and FSA.

## Competency

It is vital that euthanasia is only conducted by competent persons. A competent person is one who has relevant livestock knowledge and experience, understands the methods that they are using and the information in this guidance note. A competent person may be:

- A person that holds an appropriate slaughter licence / certificate
- An experienced veterinary surgeon
- A trained and experienced livestock keeper / stock person
- A licensed knackerman or hunt servant
- An appropriately trained and experienced deer manager / wildlife ranger / gamekeeper.

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## Actions to be taken by the competent person

1. Confirm that euthanasia is the best course of action for the welfare of the animal.
2. Where applicable, restrain the animal if it is likely to move and therefore increase the health and safety risk (e.g. restrain in a crush).
3. Euthanase (incl. bleeding/ pithing if required) the animal ASAP with a method relevant to the animal type.
4. Monitor the animal for at least 15 minutes and check that the procedure has been effective.
5. If the animal does not show the signs of death (outlined below), follow the actions listed below and re-check the procedure has been effective.
6. Move the carcase to storage prior to disposal.

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## Other things to consider

1. Where possible the animal should be euthanased away from public view and the view of other animals, however, in an emergency this is not always practical and the animal must not be moved if it will cause it unnecessary suffering. Consider screening if general public may be in the area (e.g. footpath).

2. Before you attempt to carry out euthanasia ensure you have:

- Sufficient and appropriate ammunition (including spares)
- The right equipment (including a pithing rod / knife as necessary)
- Well maintained equipment (using mal-functioning equipment will jeopardise the animal's welfare and be a health and safety risk).

3. Consider the health and safety of yourself and others around you when carrying out euthanasia:

- Animals can be highly unpredictable when stressed, in pain and in unfamiliar circumstances.
- Always consider the need for appropriate restraint to avoid being attacked and have a safe exit from the environment if necessary.
- Also consider the equipment you are using (beware of shots ricocheting off floors or walls; are you likely to injure yourself using your equipment in the location you are in?).

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## Storage

Carcases must be stored away from other livestock, in places where they will not cause contamination of feed, a food production area (e.g. dairy, parlour) or the environment. Carcasses should be covered or put in a container to protect them from dogs and vermin. Carcasses should be removed from the site promptly by an authorised collector.

## Signs of an effective kill

If a kill has been effective, the animal should have:

1. Collapsed immediately
2. Stopped rhythmic breathing
3. A fixed, glazed expression to its eyes, with no eye movement
4. Lost corneal reflex, i.e. it should not blink when you touch the cornea (the clear surface) of the eye with a finger

**SAFETY WARNING – convulsions may cause the animal to kick.**

**You must quickly decide if the kill has been effective - if it has been ineffective you must immediately re-administer emergency euthanasia.**

## Actions to be taken in the event of an ineffective stun / kill

1. If an alternative method is not available (and the equipment is working), re-administer using the same equipment. With captive bolt this will need to be in a slightly different position, with cattle higher and to one side of the previous shot.
2. If an alternative method or a stronger cartridge is quickly available, use it. Depending on the method you may need to administer in a slightly different position (as above), and follow with pithing/ bleeding (if a captive bolt).

It is essential that you then re-check that the kill has been effective.

## Bleeding & Pithing

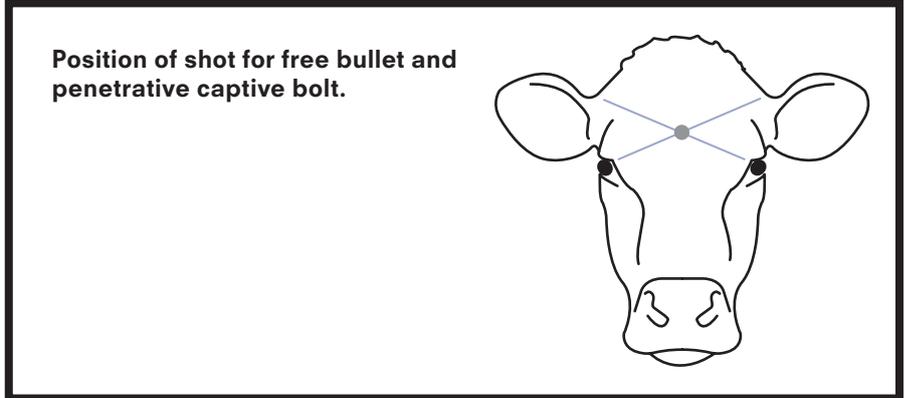
Some of the methods listed in the methods section, require pithing or bleeding in order to kill the animal (i.e. captive bolt stunning, blunt trauma). This is a statutory requirement. To carry out an effective bleed, make a cut from ear to ear with a sharp knife, cutting all the blood vessels, cutting through to the spine. Pithing is a destruction of the hind-brain, brainstem and upper spinal cord. It is achieved by inserting a rod, cane or other (e.g. 7" screwdriver) through the bolt hole, pushing it down through the foramen magnum and thrusting it back and forth a number of times. Convulsions will occur during pithing, but involuntary reflexes should cease post pithing. Pithing is effective, but aesthetically very unpleasant and is unsuitable for carcasses intended for human consumption. Pithing and bleeding is not required for methods that kill (e.g. free bullet).

# Methods

See the table below and in the following page for a summary of the suitable methods and additional guidance regarding their use.

## Cattle

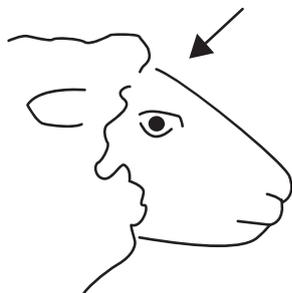
Method	Parameters
<p><b>Cattle up to 30 months</b></p> <p>Shotgun – 410 (Loaded with No. 4, 5 or 6 birdshot)</p> <p>Rifle .22 rimfire<sup>1</sup> <b>(Calves up to 6 months only)</b></p>	<p>Position end of the barrel 5-20cm from skull (do not let the gun make contact with the skull). Aim down the line of the neck toward the bulk of the body.</p> <p>Ensure animal is restrained/ unlikely to move.</p> <p><b>Warning – be careful of ricocheting.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure no other persons are in the area.</b></p>
<p>Captive bolt + bleeding / pithing</p>	<p>Muzzle of stunner must be in contact with the skull.</p> <p>Use the heaviest cartridge available</p>
<p><b>Cattle over 30 months</b></p> <p>Shotgun – 12 bore (Loaded with No. 4, 5 or 6 birdshot)</p>	<p>It is strongly recommended euthanasia of adult cattle (especially mature bulls) is carried out by a licensed slaughterman or vet.</p> <p>Position end of the barrel 5-20cm from skull (do not let the gun make contact with the skull). Aim down the line of the neck toward the bulk of the body.</p> <p>Ensure animal is restrained/ unlikely to move.</p> <p><b>Warning – be careful of ricocheting.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure no other persons are in the area.</b></p>
<p>Captive bolt + bleeding / pithing</p>	<p>Muzzle of stunner must be in contact with the skull.</p> <p>Use the heaviest cartridge available</p>



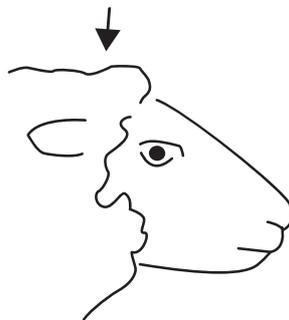
# Sheep

	Method	Parameters
<b>Newborn lambs up to 5kg</b>	External blunt trauma + bleeding	Manual or mechanical. Must be undertaken swiftly, firmly and confidently. Either:  1. Hold the animal by the back legs and deliver a firm blow to the back of the head with a blunt instrument, e.g. an iron bar or hammer.  2. Hold the animal by the back legs and swing it through an arc to hit the back of its head with considerable force against a solid object, e.g. a brick wall or metal stanchion.
	Captive bolt + bleeding / pithing	Muzzle of stunner must be in contact with the skull.
<b>Other Sheep</b>	Shotgun – 410 (Loaded with No. 4, 5 or 6 birdshot)  Rifle .22 rimfire <sup>1</sup>	Position end of the barrel 5-20cm from skull (do not let the gun make contact with the skull). Aim down the line of the neck toward the bulk of the body.  Ensure animal is restrained/ unlikely to move.  <b>Warning – be careful of ricocheting.</b>  <b>Ensure no other persons are in the area.</b>
	Captive bolt + bleeding / pithing	Muzzle of stunner must be in contact with the skull.  Use the heaviest cartridge available.

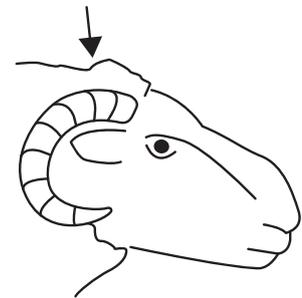
**Position of shot for sheep when using free bullet and shot gun.**



**Position of shot for polled sheep when using captive bolt.**



**Position of shot for horned sheep when using free bullet and captive bolt.<sup>2</sup>**



**Note:** As only your vet is permitted to use lethal injection, and as it is strongly recommended that humane killers are not used by stockmen, these have not been listed as methods above.

<sup>1</sup>Only to be used if authorised for this purpose on the accompanying firearm certificate.

<sup>2</sup> For very heavily horned sheep this position may be used with free bullet and shot gun, but the sheep must be stood on soft ground.