

Calf Rearing

Posted on [September 22, 2011](#) by [Graham](#)

At this time of the year, we commonly have people coming into the clinic requesting antibiotics (eg: Scourban, boluses etc.) to treat sick calves. Yes, we often find that things have got so bad that the calves do require antibiotics along with other treatments. But, antibiotic deficiency does not cause disease, bad animal husbandry does. We need to look at common underlying factors, such as:

1. **Quality of calves and their source.** Healthy looking calves that have had four days on the mother cow are best.

Advice: Best to buy direct from a farm, but if buying from the sale, look for bright calves, shiny coat and no sign of scouring.

2. **Have they had sufficient colostrum?** A good feed of colostrum in the first six – twelve hours of life makes an enormous difference to the future health of the calf. Buying from the sale, you don't know for sure.

Advice: A good idea when you get them home, is to quarantine the calves, and feed electrolytes mix only (no milk) for the first two feeds. Then change over to milk. Treat their navel with an iodine spray.

3. **Calf milk replacer (CMR)** – mixing rate and temperature.

Advice:

(a) Keep *exactly* to the mixing instructions (weigh the milk powder, don't guess). This is important for the milk to curd in the calf's stomach and to be properly digested. Don't feed diluted milk!

(b) Don't "cook" the milk powder by adding to boiling water or microwaving – this will damage the protein. Young calves do better on warm milk fed twice daily.

4. **Water, clean and ad lib.** Free lying water anywhere near the calf shed is a frequent cause of diarrhoea. This includes puddles, tractor tyre ruts, drains, washing water and swamps.

5. **Shelter and housing** – especially for the first 14 days. It is important that calves have well ventilated but sheltered, dry housing. Badly contaminated and/or wet shavings should be removed and replaced.

Advice: Calves love to chew and suck pen surfaces, so keep them clean and after cleaning, spray with a disinfectant (eg: Virkon, Halamid etc).

6. **Keep all the feeding buckets, teats, mixing equipment etc clean.**

The list goes on, but these are the main things that are going to predispose your young calves to disease. Follow all of the above and *observe* your calves carefully, at least twice a day.

If you have a problem, [contact us](#). Either make an appointment for a farm visit, or if you just want to talk to us about it, it is still a good idea to make an appointment so we can guarantee you have myself, or one of the other vets at the clinic, to discuss it.