

## CALF REARING DISEASE PREVENTION

Through Spring and Autumn, we commonly have people coming into the clinic requesting antibiotics (eg: Scourban, boluses etc.) to treat sick calves. By far the most common problem with young calves is diarrhoea. And 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, problems with animal husbandry does.

We need to look at common underlying factors, such as:

- 1. The quality of calves and their source.** Healthy looking calves that have had four days on the cow are best.  
Advice: Best to buy direct from a farm, but if buying from the saleyards, look for bright calves with a 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 the calves home is to quarantine them, put them into a pen with clean shavings and feed electrolytes only (no milk) for the first two feeds. Then change over to milk. Also 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. Clean Water, 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

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and/or wet shavings should be removed and replaced. One calf with diarrhoea can easily “spray paint” all the walls of the calf shed.

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 and mixing equipment 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.