

Calving

Every year we have bovine maternity cases where the result could have been a lot happier if the owner knew what was normal and abnormal. So here is a quick overview.

NORMAL

First stage:

Cervix starts to dilate. The cow separates from other cattle, appears uncomfortable and unsettled. She may have her tail raised. This may go on for up to six hours, sometimes longer in heifers.

Second stage:

The cow is usually down and straining. The water bag comes out first. Sometimes she will get up, walk around for a few minutes, and then go down again, pushing hard. The calf's front legs and head appear and cow should make steady progress from here. This can take up to four hours.

Third stage:

The placenta usually passes within 8 hours however it can take up to 5 days.

ABNORMAL

First Stage:

Investigate further if there has been no progress at all after six hours. You will need to put the cow in a race with a secure pole behind her. Wash the perianal and vulval area. Examine the vagina and cervix using plenty of lubricant, warm soapy water will do. If you are not comfortable doing this then give us a call and we will have a look for you.

Is the cervix fully open? If you feel a tight ring about 20cms into the vagina, about the diameter of your fist or smaller, then the cow is most likely still in first stage labour. Give her more time.

If there is a bad smell give us a call.

Second stage:

Investigate or call a Vet

- if nothing showing after two hours of pushing
- if things have stopped for twenty minutes or more
- if things look abnormal e.g. just the head showing

Vets on Riverbank



Equine & Farm Veterinary
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Calf to big or cow to small

Foetal oversize or maternal undersize is not always that easy to assess but if the head and front legs are all there, but the cow is making no progress it is most likely the cause. Put ropes on the front legs above the fetlocks and pull. You may need to guide the head into the birth canal as well. You can pull as hard as you can, but don't use tractors, motor bikes or wire strainers. "Calf pullers" should only be used if you know what you are doing. If you are not making progress within about ten minutes, call us. Too much strain or if the calf is stuck in the birth canal for too long, can cause hind limb paralysis of the cow. She is also likely to need pain control and antibiotics.

Calf presentation

If the calf is coming with two front legs and the head, then this is OK to pull. Sometimes the elbows may be flexed so pull one leg first then the other to straighten them. Often by alternating the pull between one front leg and the other you can "walk" the calf out. If it doesn't come, the calf is either too big or there is a malpresentation such as "dog sitting" where the back legs are coming too. Call your Vet.

Two legs but no head. Check they are front legs. The head needs to be brought up and turned forward. Sometimes it is easier to put a rope on one of the legs and push it back to give you more room to get the head. When you have the head up, use your rope and hand to guide the leg back up.

Two back legs. Check they are back legs (there will be a tail somewhere there, or feel the first two joints, the fetlock and hock bend opposite ways whereas with front legs, the fetlock and knee bend the same way.) If you have two back legs you are OK to pull.

If anything else is felt give us a call.

Third stage

You need to call if your cow is dull and not eating or if the placenta is retained for five days.

Also check the calf appears normal and is drinking well.