



# FIRST BREATH

THERE ARE A FEW SIMPLE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO ENSURE A CALF'S CHANCE OF SURVIVAL IMMEDIATELY AFTER BIRTH

The first few weeks of a calf's life, from birth to weaning, is critical for health. Sick calves have a significant loss in production, reduced growth, poor reproductive performance, and lower milk production as growing and mature animals. Early disease detection improves overall herd health because infected cattle

will be treated sooner, which improves cure rates and minimizes disease spread.

Factors that increase disease risk in calves include prolonged close contact between the cow and the newborn calf, exposure of the calf to manure or contaminated bedding from older cattle, drafty or cold housing conditions,

inadequate nutrition, exposure to other sick calves, and not getting enough high quality colostrum or colostrum replacer within six hours of birth.

Check calves at least twice daily. If a calf exhibits any of the following signs, it may be sick:


- Manure—changes in the colour, consistency, quantity, or manure smell;
- Calf's posture and demeanour—the calf appears depressed, or lethargic, is in an abnormal position, or does not get up when stimulated;
- Eyes—the eyes appear dull, or sunken, or have a discharge in the corners;
- Ears—the ears may hang down, or droop, or are cold to the touch;
- Nose—the nose is dry, cracked or crusty, has a purulent discharge, or contains excess mucous;
- Navel—the navel is swollen, hot, hard, or painful (calf kicks at the navel or struggles when the navel is touched);
- Breathing—if a calf's breathing is shallow, laboured, rapid, uneven, or if it's coughing, grunting, or whistling while it breathes, this may indicate illness;
- Rectal temperature—normal rectal temperature for a calf is 38.6 to 39.4 degrees Celsius. Newborn calves have slightly higher normal temperatures measuring 38.5 to 40.5 C;
- Appetite—unfinished meals, poor suckle response and slower drinking speed are indicators of poor or decreased appetite;
- Growth—poor height or weight gain.



Calf Care Corner delivers the latest information and ideas to help you improve the way calves are raised on your farm. If you have any comments or questions about Calf Care Corner, send an email to [info@calfcare.ca](mailto:info@calfcare.ca).



If you are unsure if a calf is sick, take its temperature. If a calf is exhibiting symptoms and-or has an elevated temperature, consult your herd veterinarian on appropriate treatment or follow veterinarian-approved health protocols. Early detection of sick calves, accurate diagnosis, and timely treatment will prevent future disease outbreaks. This will save you time and expense while ensuring your calves grow to their full production potential.

See Veal Farmers of Ontario's *Early Disease Detection* booklet (enclosed in this issue of *Milk Producer*) for more details on identifying disease and preventing it from becoming a serious problem on your farm. 

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## WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HOW TO RAISE HEALTHY CALVES?

This year, the 2016 Dairy and Veal Healthy Calf Conference takes place on Nov. 29, 2016 in Stratford, Ont. and Dec. 1, 2016 in Maxville, Ont. New this year, on Nov. 29 the conference will broadcast as a webinar. If you cannot travel to the conference locations you can participate remotely. The 2016 Healthy Calf Conference will focus on practical ways to improve the health and welfare of your calves. After leaving the conference, you will have the knowledge needed to go home and make simple changes to your management to improve lifelong performance of your calves. Go to [www.calfcare.ca](http://www.calfcare.ca) to learn more or register.