



FIRST BREATH

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

While it is a relief to get a calf out after a hard calving, these calves are still highly vulnerable. Dystocia is a major risk factor for stillbirths and infectious diseases in early life. Some calves born following severe dystocia can survive quite well, which may lead to underestimating the level of assistance other calves require since calves experiencing mild dystocia can still be negatively affected. There are a few simple steps you can take to ensure a calf's survival immediately after birth, particularly following a difficult calving.

to make sure it's able to breathe. You can insert a piece of straw into the nasal cavity, or pour some cold water on the calf's head. These methods should initiate the gasp reflex to encourage respiration. A healthy calf should attempt to breathe within 30 seconds of birth.

2. Dry the calf off—if the dam is unable to dry her calf off, or if you are removing the calf immediately, as recommended in herds at risk for Johne's, it is critical that you dry the calf. Using a clean, dry towel, you can 'fluff dry' the calf from the tail to the head, just as the cow does. Drying vigorously, especially around the shoul-

dering well, you need to administer colostrum. This provides the calf with disease-fighting antibodies and increases its blood volume. It also improves the calf's blood circulation, which can help correct metabolic acidosis.

While it may be difficult to know which calves need extra help, these are simple and quick steps you can follow, some of which you may already use. These steps are useful for any calf, and will not cause harm even if the calf is not suffering negative effects from calving. Taking a calf's temperature is another reliable indicator of health. Remember a newborn's temp is usually a few degrees higher to start; an excessive drop in temperature may indicate it is struggling.

However, one thing you should NOT do is hang a calf upside down. This can cause fluids to come out of the stomach, rather than the lungs. Instead, you can lay a calf over a bale, and allow the head to extend over the edge, as recommended by Sheila McGuirk, professor, medical sciences, veterinary medicine at the University of Wisconsin.

MONITOR CLOSELY

Continue to keep an eye on these calves as they grow. Consider tagging hutches or pens from difficult calvings. You may want to handle these calves with extra care when moving them since they can commonly suffer from fractured ribs.

Taking just a couple extra minutes to get your calves breathing and dry, and ensuring quick administration of colostrum are critical for proper respiratory function, thermoregulation, and the ability to fight disease.



REMOVE MUCOUS from around the calf's mouth and nose to make sure it can breathe. You can insert a piece of straw into the nasal cavity, or pour some cold water on the calf's head. These methods should initiate the gasp reflex to encourage respiration.

PHYSIOLOGY OF CALVING

When a calf's umbilicus is broken, it can no longer get oxygen from its dam and must breathe in air. Calves can develop respiratory acidosis after a difficult calving. If this condition is not corrected, the calf can develop metabolic acidosis. This causes the calf's blood pH to rise, which can decrease its ability to absorb immunoglobulins (antibodies) from colostrum. Consider the following steps to help your calf overcome the challenge of a difficult start, and get them on the right track:

Newborn care

1. Clear the airway—remove mucous from around the calf's mouth and nose

ders and neck, encourages respiration. The calf stretches out, which encourages breathing. However, do not slap or hit the chest excessively. It is also critical to get the calf sternal (rather than letting it lay on its side), and encourage its attempts to rise. Drying helps the calf regulate its body temperature. Otherwise, heat is removed from the calf as water evaporates, leaving the calf highly susceptible to chilling, and wasting its energy stores. Young calves have little subcutaneous fat and minimal insulation. Calves with poor respiration also struggle more to regulate their temperature.

3. Give colostrum—once the calf is



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.