

Ensuring a Good Start to Life for Your Calves

Environment

Calves should be born in an environment that is:

Clean

Warm

Dry

Calves born taking a nose dive into the gutter or landing on a bedded pack soaked with urine and manure from sick cows and other cows that have freshened will likely become sick. In wet, dirty environments, calves are more likely to develop scours from bacteria such as: E. coli, Salmonella and Johne's Disease.

The cow either needs to be in the freshening area before the preparation stage so she has time to adjust to her new location **or after she has entered the expulsion stage.** Putting her in the freshening area after she has entered the preparation stage can delay freshening as she adjusts to her new location and that delay can affect getting a healthy calf.

Assistance

Once the cow enters the expulsion stage (stage 2), she should **be checked every 30 minutes to make sure she is progressing normally.** If the calf is not in normal presentation, it should be repositioned so that there is a head and two front feet or a tail and two back feet in the birth canal. At that time, the calf can be pulled.

Assess the calf when it has been completely delivered. Check to make sure it is breathing, if not, stick fingers in the nostrils and rub the back of the neck. Make sure calf's umbilicus is not still bleeding. If it is, trying it off with umbilical tape or holding for a minute should get it to stop.

Remove calf from cow and place in clean, dry pen.

Colostrum

Calves should be fed **4 quarts (1 gallon) of warm colostrum by 4 hours after birth.**

The sooner the calf is fed the better. If the calf is not willing to drink on its own, use an esophageal tube feeder to force feed colostrum to the calf.

The calf should receive **at least 2 quarts of warm colostrum during a second feeding around 8-12 hours after birth.** A third feeding can be offered around 18-20 hours after birth, however, this feeding can be skipped if the calf is not willing to drink on its own.

Remember: the antibodies in the colostrum are no longer available to the calf 24 hours after birth. Feeding colostrum to the calf after the first 24 hours of life will have no effect on immune function.