



## Cows Calving: When Problems Arise!

Thankfully the vast majority of cows are able to deliver their calf with minimal assistance. However, it is important to be prepared for the cases that do require help.

**Calving pen:** You should aim to calve all cows and heifers in a designated calving pen. The number of pens depends on the size of the herd and the spread of calving. Pens should be dry, bright, well lit at night and have ample clean bedding. A method for safe restraint of the cow is required.

**Equipment:** As a minimum there should be suitable calving ropes (clean and disinfected), calving jack, arm length gloves, obstetrical lubricant and iodine for the calf's navel.

Normal calving generally follows this pattern:

- Stage 1: cows are off-feed and restless 'sick for calving' as contractions begin- lasts approx. 2-6 hours (longer in heifers)
- Stage 2: When cervix is fully dilated most cows lie down and abdominal contractions followed by appearance of water bag at vulva
- Cow may be restless and change position
- Forceful abdominal contractions should be followed by the appearance of two feet at vulva
- Birth usually occurs approx. 1-2 hours (cows)/ 2-4 hours (heifers) after appearance of water bag

As a general rule it is best to leave cows alone and observe from a distance. However, investigate if cows are not making normal progress. For example, cows 'sick for calving' for more than 8 hours, or cows making no apparent progress more than 60 minutes after abdominal contractions have begun. Restrain cow and examine internally- use glove, lubricant and be gentle.

In cows at stage 2 check:

- Cow is fully dilated
- Calf is presented normally- both feet with nose palpable behind
- If the membranes surrounding calf are intact or ruptured

Indications of problems requiring assistance at this stage would be if cow feels tight on your hand, if you weren't clearly able to feel the calf, abnormal discharge (bloody or smelly), dry birth canal or malpresentation of calf (eg. only the head is found in birth canal; one foot only, feet but no head; tail only; multiple legs as with twins etc.).

If all is normal at this time then you can allow the cow more time, or you may decide to intervene. If you decide to intervene and everything appears normal then attach calving ropes to the calf's legs (above the fetlocks). Apply obstetrical lubricant to the birth canal and use gentle traction either manually or with the calving jack. Release the pressure intermittently and direct the force downwards and away rather than directly behind the cow. A lot of

## Welcome!

Welcome to our first newsletter! We are planning to release regular newsletters aimed at providing professional veterinary advice on relevant animal health topics. These will also be available on our website:

[www.ennisveterinarsurgery.com](http://www.ennisveterinarsurgery.com).

Spring is a busy and exciting time of year with plenty lambs and calves already on the ground! In this newsletter we have included some information on problems at calving, calf scour and some considerations when preparing cattle housed over winter for turn-out to grass. If there are topics that you would like included in our next newsletter please contact us with your ideas!! We'd love to hear from you!

As a mixed practice we cater for animals large and small. If you, or a family member, are interested in keeping up to date with issues that arise in the practice why not follow us on Facebook?



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## What to do while waiting for the vet

Release cow from restraint and let her rest

If traction was applied to calf remove ropes and gently repel calf back into the uterus (if possible) to avoid unnecessary stress to the calf

If you think a caesarean section is required it is a good idea to have the following available:

- Head gate or a halter that can be tied to secure point so cow/heifer can be restrained allowing access to her left flank
- Adequate lighting
- Assistance – an extra pair (or 2!) of hands is always welcome!
- 2 or 3 buckets of clean water
- Soap and washing up liquid
- Towel
- Baler twine

You can make a cuppa once all that is done but please keep your phone close!

damage can be done to the cow or calf by inappropriate use of calving jacks (the force generated is equivalent to more than 6 men pulling)! If progress is not being made after a few minutes then release the pressure and reassess.

If at any stage during the calving things don't appear 'right' then they probably aren't!! Involving the vet at an early stage allows the problem to be identified and professionally handled increasing the likelihood of a better outcome for cow and calf.

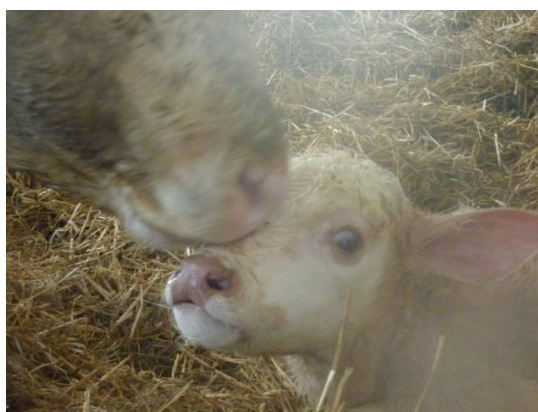
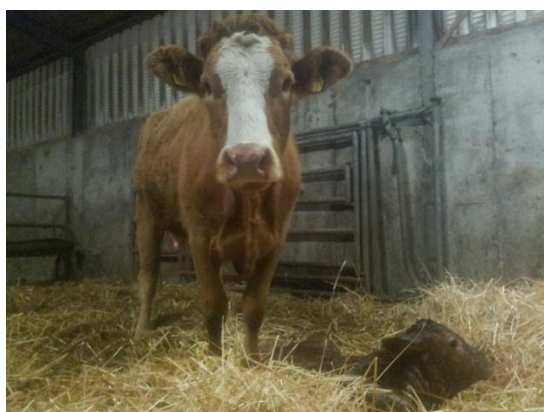
The most common calving problems vets encounter can be divided into 3 categories:

1. **Malpresentation of calf**- eg. Calf coming head first with no legs in canal, rear end first with only tail or in the case of twins, head of one calf and legs of a second. A lot of these cases can be rectified with skilled manipulation and the calf then delivered normally although some do require a caesarian section to be performed.

2. **Foetal oversize**- Occurs when the calf is physically too large to fit through the birth canal (i.e. the cow's pelvis). If a calf is too big its legs may be crossed over one another in the birth canal, the calf may feel very far down in the cow's uterus (womb) or when traction is applied the head may not follow the legs into the canal and/or may keep slipping off to the side. In these cases the only solution is to perform a caesarean section and the earlier the better. Prolonged traction is only going to cause injury to the cow and result in injury or loss of the calf.

3. **Various other conditions/ abnormalities**- eg. Incomplete cervical dilation, dead or deformed calf, twisted uterus or uterine atony due to a problem with the cow. Each of these examples will need an individual approach and most will require the assistance of your vet.

We wish you the best of luck during this calving season and look forward to seeing lots of healthy calves on the ground. If you do require advice or assistance we are only a phone call away! There will be problems but as the old sporting saying says 'by failing to prepare you are preparing to fail!' PS: If you have a smart phone why not take a snap of your best calves of the season and send them to our e.mail account?? With your permission we'd love to share them on facebook!! ☺



## Neonatal Diarrhoea (Scour) in Calves

One of the most common diseases to affect calves in their first weeks of life is diarrhoea (scour). Scour can be caused by one or more agents that include a variety of bacteria, viruses and parasites or it may be nutritional in origin. Here we will discuss it under the following headings: Treatment, Diagnosis and Prevention.

### 1. Treatment

Replacing the fluids is the most important step in treating scouring calves. In the early stages of the disease oral fluids (eg. Lectade or Bactidiaryl) will provide adequate fluid and electrolyte replacement. In an emergency you can use the following homemade solution: 1tbsp salt, 2tsps glucose and 1tbsp baking soda in 1.5litres of potable water. Affected calves should receive at least 6 litres of an electrolyte solution per day.

More severe cases can become dehydrated rapidly. Signs can include a low body temperature (< 101.5°F), loss of skin elasticity and sunken eyes. These calves need urgent care and should be moved to a draft-free pen with deep, dry bedding and a heat lamp (2 to 3 foot above calf). Intravenous fluid therapy offers these calves the best chance of survival as oral fluids are often ineffective at this stage.

Milk: Some calf scours are nutritional ie. the young calf's intestine can't yet handle the quantity of milk or replacer it's receiving. In these cases the

withholding of milk for up to 48 hours can be beneficial (longer can cause harm). However, other fluids must be provided during this time.

Antibiotics: If the scour is caused by bacteria such as E.coli or Salmonella then antibiotics may be beneficial.

Binding agents: eg. Kaolin can be used to help reduce the fluid losses.

Probiotics: Natural yogurt is useful in the calf recovering from scour as it helps to restore the natural flora of the gut.

### 2. Diagnosis

Traditionally diagnosing the cause of scour on a farm involved the submission of faecal samples to a laboratory. We now use screening tests in our clinic that can provide us with these results on the same day allowing you to treat your calf more effectively and tackle problems on your individual farm without delay.



Test showing faecal sample positive for **Cryptosporidium**

### 3. Prevention

The most important step in preventing scour in the calf is ensuring adequate intake of **colostrum** within the first 6-12 hours of life. Aim to feed 10% body weight eg. a 45kg calf should receive 4 to 5 litres of

good quality colostrum. The next most important measure is **good hygiene**. Cows should calve down in a specified calving pen with clean new bedding. In order to allow adequate cleaning between cows at least 1 calving pen for every 15 cows should be available. Treat the navel of all calves with an appropriate antiseptic immediately after birth. Clean the cow's teats and udder before the calf suckles.

The third most important step in the prevention of scour is using the information we gained from our diagnosis (see above) to put specific targeted measures in place. If viral diarrhoea (rota- or coronavirus) or E.coli is diagnosed then it is essential that remaining cows are vaccinated at least 3 weeks before calving. It is essential that the calf receives colostrum soon after birth as this is how protection from the vaccinated cow is passed to her calf. If time isn't available to implement a vaccination program then commercial oral solutions containing antibodies can be administered to calves at birth.

If cryptosporosis or coccidiosis is diagnosed then specific medication can be prescribed to administer to newborn calves which greatly reduces the chances of them developing the disease (there is no vaccine currently available to combat these agents).





ENNIS VETERINARY SURGERY

## Contact Us:

If you have any queries or require further advice on any of the topics contained in this newsletter do not hesitate to contact us.

Emergency  
24hour number:  
(065) 6829599

## On Line:

Leaflets on calving and calf care available to download at:

[www.AnimalHealthIreland.ie](http://www.AnimalHealthIreland.ie)

## Just for Fun!

"Cows with Guns!"

Watch the video to this epic song at:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQMbXvn2RNI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQMbXvn2RNI)

For the cow-lover 'Beautiful cows photography' Facebook page is worth a look!



## Points to Ponder at Turnout

### 1. Dosing

Before turnout draw up a dosing plan.

Must control: Stomach worms, lung worms and liver and rumen fluke.

Many products on the market so research and planning now can save cash and give you better performance while on grass.

### 2. Vaccination

All beef stock should receive a Clostridial vaccine.

Spring is a good time to give cows their booster for Leptospirosis and to begin the primary course for heifers.

Others: eg. BVD or IBR can also be considered at this time.

### 3. Scanning cows

Any Autumn calving cows should be scanned before turnout to make sure they are back in calf.

### 4. Redwater (Babesia)

There are two peaks of redwater in the year: one in Spring and one in Autumn, directly correlated with tick activity.

Signs of redwater are: Dull, lethargic animal; characteristic red-coloured urine being passed. If a lot of red blood cells have already been damaged and animal is anaemic gums and membranes around eyes will be pale.

#### Prevention:

- Dose regularly with a pour-on that is effective against ticks
- Use 'Imizol' as a preventative injection
- Avoid putting at-risk animals in high risk areas.

### 5. Grass Tetany

Grass tetany is a condition that primarily affects lactating cows at pasture. It is caused by low blood magnesium levels.

Affected cows will display a nervous twitch and they may stagger.

It can have a rapid onset and can result in sudden death in cows.

**Prevention** involves ensuring that cows are receiving an adequate intake of magnesium especially during periods of rapid grass growth. Using a bolus, adding magnesium to water or meal, or dusting the pasture, are all reliable methods of administration to vulnerable cows.