



## KEEPING CALVES HEALTHY – CALF CARE

### AIM: TO PROVIDE FARMERS WITH INFORMATION ON CALF CARE TO PRODUCE HEALTHY CALVES

- ❖ Female calves are your future milking animals. So it's important to look after them properly.
- ❖ By looking after them you aim to **stop them from dying**, help them **grow well** and **maximise your profitability** (lifetime milk volumes and their own calves who will in turn produce more milk and more calves).

#### How can I stop my calves getting sick?

- When calves are born they are vulnerable to infection and getting sick.
- The important things to do to make sure your calf is healthy are:
  - Looking after the dam during pregnancy and calving (see *H02 Keeping your animals healthy* and *H07 diseases around calving*);
  - Making sure the cow is well fed before calving (see *F02 Making Concentrates on Farm*);
  - Helping the cow to have a smooth calving (see *R02 Calving*);
  - Make sure the cow calves in a clean area;
  - Check the calf over to see that it is normal and is breathing well;
  - Help the navel to dry off (see *H05 Keeping calves healthy*);
  - Get the calf to drink colostrum in the first six hours;
  - Keep the calf in a clean environment (see *H05B Calf housing*);
  - Check the calf regularly (*see below*);
  - Feed the calf well over the first 3 months (see *F04 Calf feeding*);

#### What are the signs of a healthy calf?

- After birth, calves should become stronger and more confident;
- They should:
  - stand up soon after birth and drink from their mother;
  - breathe easily
  - drink milk easily;
  - slowly start to explore their environment and be interested in what is happening around them;
- As a rule, a **healthy calf is a hungry calf**. Any loss of appetite is a sign of concern;

#### What are the signs my calf may not be healthy?

- Signs soon after birth are:
  - difficulty breathing,
  - not being able to suck / drink;
  - lethargy / tiredness;
  - not getting up or seeking out their dam to drink from.



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*! If you are concerned, contact your local Veterinary or Extension Officer*

### Looking for and preventing disease

- Check calves every day (ideally morning and night);
- Look out for signs of:
  - Dullness / lethargy and not being interested in its environment;
  - Difficulty breathing, coughing, respiratory signs;
  - Diarrhoea;
  - Lack of appetite – not drinking / eating;
  - Calf being thin and not putting on weight;
- If there is diarrhea, give an electrolyte drink between feeds. Available from your local vet or Agro Shop.
- If the calf does not seem right, you can take its temperature

### Calf vital signs

	Normal	Notes
<b>Temperature</b>	<b>38.5 ° to 39.5°C</b> (101.5° to 103°F)	Lift the tail and put the thermometer in the rectum, against the body wall. Make sure you don't put the thermometer in a piece of dung. A temperature over 39.5°C (103°F) may indicate infection.
<b>Respiration rate</b>	<b>24 -26</b> breaths per minute in calves less than 1 month old. <b>15 – 30</b> breaths per minute in older calves	Watch the nostrils, or ribs. If the animal is breathing normally, it can be difficult to count the breaths. Respiration varies with outside temperature, or stress of the animal.
<b>Heart/Pulse rate</b>	<b>100 to 140</b> beats per minute	Put your hand against the chest wall just next to the front leg.

### What should I do if I think my calf is sick?

- Make sure the calf has access to food and water, plus a clean, warm space to lie down;
- Keep the calf away from other animals, preferably in an isolation pen;
- Prevent infection in other animals by using good hygiene (wash hands after touching the calf; clean shoes after leaving its pen; don't use any equipment on other animals before cleaning (e.g. disinfect buckets and bottles);
- Safely dispose of any bedding and clean pens once the sick calf leaves.

Call your **local Veterinary Officer** for advice.

ZDTP is focused on supporting dairy farmers to improve their productivity, milk quality and linkages to urban markets. The views expressed in this publication are those of the implementers of the programme and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Zealand Government. For further information, please contact ZDTP on [zdtpinfo@primeconsultants.net](mailto:zdtpinfo@primeconsultants.net). Follow us on [www.zambiadairy.com](http://www.zambiadairy.com), Facebook ([facebook.com/zambiadairy/](https://facebook.com/zambiadairy/)) and Twitter (@DairyZambia).