

CALVING EASE

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BIOSECURITY WHEN THE VETERINARIAN WORKS WITH CALVES

We work with calves all the time. Lots of biosecurity activities have become habits for us. This is not true for your veterinarian. He or she works with adult animals most of the time. Other times are spent with older heifers, often those of breeding age or older.

It is in our best interest to keep our calves alive and healthy. Preventing accidental transmission of diseases by a health care professional is one way we accomplish this goal. So, what can we do to “coach” our veterinarian to follow the basic biosecurity routines with newborn and very young calves?

KEEP ADULT COW MANURE AWAY FROM CALVES

More often than not your veterinarian is on the farm to provide adult cow health care when someone says, “Before you leave Doc, we’ve got a couple of sick calves we’d like you to look at.” This topic comes up during the middle of a reproductive routine, pumping a cow’s stomach or surgery for a DA.

Let’s remember the potential sources of adult cow manure that are now associated with the veterinarian. First, their truck could easily be parked in an area that contaminates its tires with manure. If your calf housing is some distance away it makes sense to drive over to the hutches, pens or barn. If this is the case can we “coach” the vet to not drive near the calves. Park some ways away from them and walk the rest of the way.

Second, we all know that you can’t walk around in a cow barn without getting manure-covered boots. A thorough boot wash-up is called for here. And, of course, one way to get that message across is to set a good example of scrubbing

your boots as well. More and more calf barn installations are insisting on all employees and visitors walking through a sanitizing footbath as they enter the building.

Third, everyone that has worked with newborn and very young calves knows that they suck on every part of you that they can reach. That includes our clothing. If you are requesting your vet to physically handle and examine your calves those animals will come in contact with the vet's overalls. While it's probably not reasonable to change every article of clothing before going from working with adult cows to newborn calves, all veterinarians carry extra overalls in their trucks. If you have been working along with the vet in the cow barn you can set a good example by changing into a clean pair of overalls, too.

Now, we have done a pretty good job of getting rid of the adult cow manure. Oops, maybe a good handwashing would be a good idea since we may very well have our hands in calves' mouths.

AVOID PASSING PATHOGENS FROM CALF-TO-CALF

If more than one calf is to be examined, plan to look at the calves in the order from youngest to oldest. The calves under two weeks of age have less immunity to pathogens than those older calves that are ready to wean. So, take the vet to the youngest calf first even if that's not the most convenient route. For example, examine the ten-day-old calf with scours before looking at the seven-week-old calf with suspected pneumonia.

We know that pathogens can be carried from calf-to-calf. This is especially true when the vet has to physically handle and examine the calf in order to make a good diagnosis. You can help prevent this kind of transmission by offering a fresh pair of disposable gloves for each calf. You can take along a pail of hot water containing some household bleach. This can be used to rinse a bolus gun or other equipment if needed. If you have individual calf pens this solution can be used to wash off boots before entering another pen.

This might sound a little extreme but if you have ever lived through a severe bacterial scours or respiratory illness outbreak you know from experience it's just basic biosecurity.

If you know of someone that doesn't currently receive **Calving Ease** but would like to, tell them to **WRITE** to Calving Ease, 11047 River Road, Pavilion, NY 14525 or to **CALL** either 716-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or 716-343-8128 (Offhaus Farms Office) or **FAX** (716-591-2898) or **e-mail** sleadley@servtech.com. A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at www.americanprotein.com/calf/calnotes/APCcalnotes.htm and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.