

# CALVING EASE

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Sam Leadley (Attica Veterinary Associates) and Pam Sojda (Offhaus Farms)

## Me? Sick from a Calf?

We seldom give much thought to getting sick. But, it does happen not only to us but others with whom we live. Maybe we need to be reminded that calves can be a source of pathogens that make people ill. Technically, these are called zoonotic diseases meaning that the pathogens can pass from animals to humans.

"Oh," you say. "You mean ringworm?" Yes, that's one of them. Actually, there are way too many to list here. Most of them represent little risk. For example, our herds are free of tuberculosis and brucellosis so our risk of catching the human version of those diseases is nearly zero.

But, some bacteria and parasites are very common. And, some of them can spread to us. The parasite *Cryptosporidium* is found in large numbers on most dairy farms, especially among calves five to fourteen days old. We also find *Campylobacter* bacteria on dairy animals, especially calves.

### How would we expose our families?

As calf raisers our own exposure to these two pathogens is often both high and constant. Since they both cause diarrhea and most of us are not constantly sick with that, our immune systems must be pretty effective in dealing with the pathogens that find their way into our digestive tract.

But, just because we don't get diarrhea doesn't mean other people in the household can't get infected by "Crypto" or "Campylo." Yup, they can get high enough exposure, even if they don't go near the barn or hutches.

Do any of these sound familiar? "The sitter is sick, I'll take the kids (including the baby) with me while I feed calves." Or, visiting non-farm relative with small children : "Let's take the kids to see the animals. They'd love to pet the calves." Or, grandma comes in from calf chores and is greeted by non-farm daughter-in-law:

"Here, Mom, please hold the baby while I finish this." Or, Jimmy, the calf-raiser, comes in from calf chores just as his non-farm grandparents arrive for a visit: "Come here Jimmy and give your grandma a big hug!"

Part of being family is sharing, being close to one another and touching. But, certain friends and family are more at risk for contracting zoonotic diseases than others. Did you recognize some of them above? Infants. Elderly. Persons who are or have been ill, especially with an illness or operation that seriously depresses their immune system. Think, too, of persons treated for cancer with radiation and/or chemotherapy. Maybe we've missed some but the point is to think about other persons' ability to resist pathogens.

### **Bio-security for our families**

The public health folks' advice is wash, wash, wash! The principle here is that the bacteria or parasites are carried to our mouth by our hands. If our hands are free of them our oral intake will be reduced. Some examples. Babies are perhaps the most vulnerable since their hands and mouths are in frequent contact. As a grandfather Sam always showers and changes clothes before holding his grandchildren - usually that means skipping little hugs at lunch time or when the grandchildren come out to see the calves. As a mother maybe this means dressing an infant to reduce "hands-in-mouth" activity if the baby must go along at chore time.

One of our best bio-security activities as calf raisers is to thoroughly wash our hands with warm water and soap. As we finish calf chores, if we wash at least our hands at the calf barn or milk house sink we have eliminated the most common source of contamination before we go into the house. (Cleaning boots and changing clothing doesn't do any harm, either.) Clean hands pass on fewer pathogens when we open doors, handle objects in the kitchen like the kitchen faucet and refrigerator door, and touch hands when we greet visitors.

### **CALF FEEDER'S TIP**

How many times has this happened? You dip the navel on a newborn. Momma continues to lick and clean up the calf. You come back; almost no sign of any navel dip left. Many of us dip at least twice; once as soon after birth as possible to get dip into the open navel and again after separating calf from cow to disinfect again and encourage rapid drying of the navel.

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 585-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or 585-343-8128 (Offhaus

Farms Office) or **FAX** (585-591-2898) or **e-mail** [sleadley@frontiernet.net](mailto:sleadley@frontiernet.net) or [pams91@2ki.net](mailto:pams91@2ki.net) . A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at [www.calfnotes.com](http://www.calfnotes.com) and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.