

Nasty Navels

Issue 2, 2023

While our teams are out debudding, we check the navels of every calf. This year we have noticed an all too common problem – **navel infections**. The navel is the hole in the body wall that the umbilical cord enters through. This supplies the calf all its nutrients while in the uterus so contains blood vessels and other important structures that can act like a highway for bacteria if allowed. There are a few easy steps that can prevent this problem in the first place!



Navel Ill Treatment:

At least 5 days of an appropriate antibiotic and a once off anti-inflammatory injection. Call us to discuss.

Navel Infections

Navel ill is serious and can kill calves. Until the navel is dry, the vessels of the umbilicus remain hollow tubes which act as a gateway for bacteria to get straight into the calf's bloodstream. This can result in liver infections, joint ill, brain abscesses and more. Infection around the navel cord itself causes it to thicken and leads to abscess formation.



Prevention:

- Frequent calf pickup– get them off the mud ASAP!
- Wash and disinfect your calf trailer daily – this can be a breeding ground for bacteria!
- Ensure the entire navel is doused in a 10% iodine spray (spirit based).
- Continue spraying navels until they have shriveled up and are dry– on average this takes 5 days.
- Don't over stock your calf pens– measure them- 1.5m²/ calf.

Look for:

- A swollen, distended navel which will often have pus.
- Calves that won't drink or are looking off colour.
- Swollen joints–remember bacteria can spread via the blood!
- Strange behavior–circling, shaking, constantly looking up-this tells us there is an infection in the brain or spine.

Feel for:

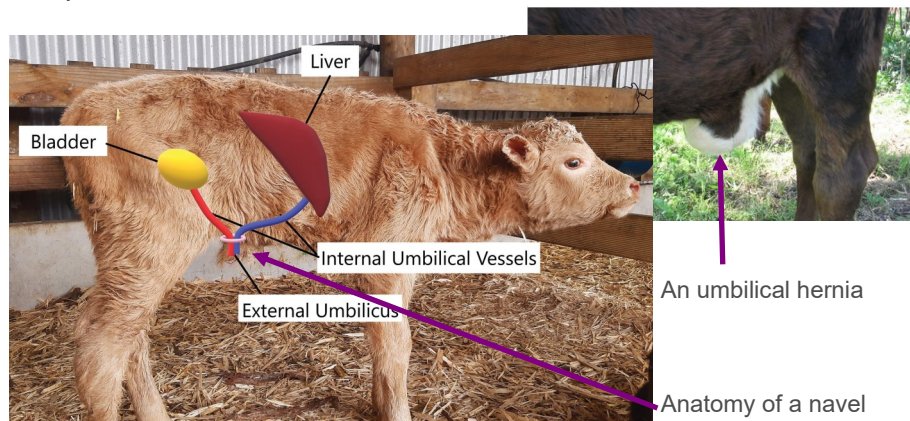
- A thickened cord inside the navel (larger than your pinky finger)
- Hard lumps inside the navel cord
- Heat or pain around the navel

Umbilical Hernias

Hernias appear as large, soft, fluid-feeling swellings below the navel. They are caused when the calf's body wall hasn't closed over properly during development. This allows space for abdominal fat and occasionally a loop of intestines to pop out forming a pouch. An umbilical hernia differs from an abscess as the swelling can be pushed back inside the abdomen.

- Smaller hernias (less than 3.5cm long) are generally not an issue, and will heal with little intervention. Recheck at weaning!
- Larger hernias (over 3.5cm long) are more of an issue, with a chance of a section of gut getting trapped. If this went untreated it will cause death. **We recommend operating on these calves.**

As hernias are inherited we would recommend that any calves with hernias are not bred from. Identification systems such as 'H' tags are a simple way to identify any cows that have had a hernia at breeding time.



Colostrum and enrichment

2023

Why is Colostrum so important?

Calves are born with no immune system as immunoglobulins (antibodies that fight infections) are **not** spread through the cow's placenta!

High levels of immunoglobulins are found in colostrum therefore they depend entirely on drinking good colostrum for protection against viral and bacterial disease until they develop their own immunity at 3-4 weeks old. However, absorption is only possible for a short time. Absorption is greatest within the first 2 hours of life and gradually decreases until ceasing completely by 24 hours when the gut wall 'closes'.

4 Q's for Colostrum Management

- **Quality:** Collect colostrum within 12 hours of birth. You can use a Brix refractometer to assess antibody concentration, the **Ideal is >22%**. **Keep the best for the new born calves.**
- **Quickly:** Feed calves as soon as possible after birth. Ideally within **6-12 hours**
- This means you should be picking calves up **at least every 12 hours!**
- **Quantity:** 10% of bodyweight needs to be fed - **Ideally 4L**
- **Squeaky clean:** Collect colostrum in clean containers that have lids to help reduce bacterial contamination. Don't pool colostrum from different cows.

Tubing Newborn Calves

When and Why:

Ideally calves should drink enough colostrum on their own, however this doesn't always happen! If they don't drink 4-6L within the first 6-12 hours they must be tube fed. Sick calves or calves that don't drink later on will also need tube feeding with electrolytes.

Tips for easy tubing:

Restraint: back calves into a corner and straddle them.

- Tube length: the tube should go from the calves nose to its elbow to ensure good positioning in the stomach.
- Avoid drowning: make sure your tube is kinked/closed while inserting it.
- Don't force it! The calf should swallow the tube- if there is any resistance STOP and try again.

Drop Colostrum
Here

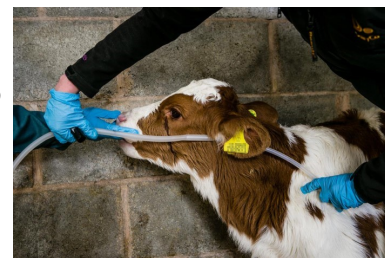
Then Look Here



Bring your refractometer in to be shown how to calibrate and use it!

We can help with a "Well Calf" checkup!

- Vet visit and blood test 6 calves (1-7 days old)
- Check colostrum quality and management and identify early if improvements are needed
- In house lab test= Same day results
- Cost: \$141 excl. or \$110 at debudding.



Enrichment for calves

- ***Why?** Introducing toys enhances the overall welfare of the calves by reducing stress and promoting physical and mental stimulation. Just like any young animal, calves have a natural curiosity and playfulness that can be harnessed through toys, helping them develop social and cognitive skills. Engaged calves are also less likely to exhibit harmful behaviors like sucking/biting or doing their best to destroy the calf pen- contributing to better overall health.
- ***How?** You don't have to spend lots of money on toys! Have a **flax plant** in the garden? Cut some pieces off and tie around gates. Old kids toys? Put them on a rope in a pen so calves can headbutt them instead of you!
- ***Caution:** Toys should not be spread between pens without thorough disinfection as they can spread diseases!

