

River View Veterinary Service Newsletter

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215 N Main Street
PO Box 250
Port Byron, IL 61275
Office: 309.848.9093
Fax: 309.848.9094
www.riverviewvets.com



News and Upcoming Events:

- Thanks to all that attended Calving School in January!

*Welcome to the River View Veterinary Service Newsletter,
designed to provide cattle producers with
timely information and education on a variety of topics.
Sarah Foust, DVM and Terry Foust, DVM*

Prevention of Baby Calf Diseases

(Adapted from Iowa Beef Center, Bulgin, M., June 1914)

Prevention of disease is, of course, preferred to treatment. One key to prevention, according to some, is to keep things simple or as natural as possible. But in nature or the wild, disease of the newborn often causes rates of loss that would be unprofitable for livestock producers. And while it might be wise to keep things natural or simple, the fact is, the situation has been made unnatural by putting up fences, crowding the animals, fixing the calving season, and giving the cattle no choice as to feed. A word of caution is in order. Subpar husbandry of the cattle usually cannot be overcome by anything that comes through a needle, a tube, or a balling gun! The damage can be minimized in some cases, but a full investigation should point to needed changes that lead to total prevention.

Three factors are extremely important in determining whether a calf remains healthy, survives a disease, or dies. Managers must recognize all these factors:

1. The amount of immunity the calf receives from the dam via colostrum. Specific immunity to infectious disease is available to the calf only through the first milk (colostrum). The cow has to do a good job of manufacturing these antibodies, and to do that, she has to be doing well herself for the many months before calving. The newborn calf has the capacity to absorb the colostrum antibodies into its bloodstream only for the first 12 to 24 hours of life.

2. Kind and amount (dose) of infectious disease agents in the calf's environment. Whether an agent causes a disease or not depends on how potent its disease-causing ability (pathogenicity) is, the number of organisms the calf is exposed to (dose), and the amount of antibodies carried by the calf (strength of immunity). Infections through the navel (navel ill) occur at birth, especially under conditions of heavy contamination of wet muddy maternity areas. From the navel, the infections commonly spread to joints (joint ill), belly cavity, heart-sac, and brain. Clean calving areas and the practice of soaking the navel with strong tincture of iodine soon after birth are important and logical factors for preventing navel infections.

3. Stress is a factor that facilitates or encourages the establishment of disease. Stress refers to situations and conditions that appear to make an individual more susceptible to disease than usual. For newborn calves, lack of adequate energy supply (milk) and cold, damp, windy weather are common sources of stress.

Are you ready for calving season? Let's get your prevention protocols in place!