

River View Veterinary Service Newsletter

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News and Upcoming Events:

- Mark your calendars! Calving School is scheduled for January 31 at the Cordova Civic Center! Be sure to RSVP by January 20!

*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*

Broken Bones in Calves

(Adapted from Progressive Cattleman, Thomas, H., Dec. 2017)

Broken bones are sometimes seen in cattle, especially young calves. This can be a result of accidents (cow steps on calf) or from excessive and improper pressure applied while pulling a calf.

Dr. Eric Laporte, Bonnyville Veterinary Clinic, says, "The sooner a fracture can be assessed, the better." Some fractures are more easily repaired than others, depending on their location. Fractures higher in the leg are more difficult to stabilize than lower on the leg.

There are splints designed for hind limb injuries, and these can often immobilize the leg enough for it to heal. Plastic splints, fiberglass, and even PVC pipe can be used to stabilize the leg.

"The nice thing about newborns is that as long as the blood supply is intact, and we don't get infection in the injured area, fractures usually heal very well if we can control the weight-bearing force," says Dr. David Anderson, a veterinarian in the large animal clinical sciences department of University of Tennessee. Young calves' bones heal more quickly than those of an older animal, especially if you can support the fracture properly. They heal even if the break is not perfectly in place, but heal better and more quickly if the fracture is set correctly. The sooner the calf can be treated, the better. "The longer you leave it, the higher the risk for more damage," says Laporte. If the skin hasn't been broken open, yet, there's also less chance for infection – and a better prognosis.

Early intervention is important. Getting a clean towel around it (to keep it clean and protect it) and using something to hold it in place and wrap it can be helpful," Laporte says. A splint can be created from a PVC pipe cut lengthwise and using strong tape to hold it in place around a towel-wrapped leg.

After you discover the animal, get it somewhere clean and dry (out of the mud), and confined in a small area so it won't have to walk to feed and water or follow mom very far. "Keep the calf from putting weight on the leg. Sometimes we put the leg in a sling. If a calf has already been up and around before the injury occurred, it can walk around fairly well on three legs for short periods of time," says Anderson. "A sling might keep the calf from damaging the limb further, until a veterinarian can come look at the calf."

Broken bones in calves are not a death sentence. Early intervention and proper stabilization can save a calf's life.