

Tube Feeding Colostrum: 4 Rules

Our goals for colostrum feeding are:

- (1) Use clean wholesome colostrum;
- (2) Use colostrum high in antibodies;
- (3) Feed it as soon after birth as possible;
- (4) Feed four litres within the first six hours. Technically, it is 3.8 litres but I've rounded it up to 4

But, some calves won't suckle at all, others will only nurse just small amounts from a bottle, so we end up using an stomach tube feeder.

Remember these 4 tube feeding rules.

Rule #1, only use a CLEAN feeder. Tube feeders should always be washed completely after each use.

- After using begin by rinsing with lukewarm water. Using very hot water only makes milk proteins stick to the inside. These proteins form an excellent growth layer for bacteria. Not good!
- Then scrub with a brush in hot soapy water with some bleach added to it. Get a pulsator or inflation brush with a small end that will fit into the tube to clean it after each use. It is okay to use a chlorinated detergent for this, as well.
- An acid rinse in warm water will extend the time before bacteria being to grow again.
- Be sure to hang the parts up so they will drain and dry completely.
- If the tube feeder is used frequently, consider replacing it regularly to prevent milk solids buildup on the inside surfaces.

If there is any doubt about cleanliness, use a hot water + bleach disinfecting rinse just before each use. Using household bleach, add about thirty ml of bleach to a water-filled two-litre tube feeder. The longer the rinse is allowed to remain in the tube feeder the higher the bacteria kill rate. Use the feeder immediately after disinfecting.

Rule #2, feed body-temperature colostrum.

- We often tube feed after the calf has failed to suckle. That means the colostrum probably has cooled a lot. Warm it as needed to bring the temperature back up to 39°C before tubing.

- Placing the filled feeder in a 10 litre pail of warm water before tubing the calf will maintain a constant temperature. This is especially important in cold barns or outdoor conditions less than 10°C.

Rule #3, always keep liquid out of the tube while it is being inserted into the throat.

- Remember that the openings of the throat and windpipe are right next to each other in the back of the mouth. Keeping liquid out of the tube prevents accidental release of colostrum in the back of the mouth that could run into the windpipe.

Rule #4, always allow all liquid to drain from the tube before removing it from the throat.

- Small amounts of colostrum running from the tube as it is pulled out can easily spill into the windpipe; even tiny amounts of colostrum can cause persistent irritation and pneumonia.

For additional resources on tube feeding see:

www.calfnotes.com Calf Note #83 Using an esophageal feeder to administer colostrum