

# Preventing the Spread of Mycoplasma Infections Among Calves

Low levels of the Mycoplasma organism are likely to be present in nearly every dairy herd. In calves, it is possible to culture some Mycoplasma from between 20% and 30% of their airways.

Infections occur when calves are exposed to so many Mycoplasma pathogens that their immune defenses are overwhelmed. Here are 3 golden rules to reduce exposure:

- **Isolate all calves suspected of a Mycoplasma infection.**  
Distance is our friend in slowing calf-to-calf transmission. A separate section of hutches or isolated shed is ideal. Isolation prevents calf-to-calf contact. It also reduces the chances of us, the caretakers, carrying the pathogen from infected to non-infected calves as we feed, bed and treat them.
- **Leave the housing empty for as long as possible.**  
Mycoplasma organisms are hard to kill. In liquid, they can survive as long as 6 months. Moisture is Mycoplasma's friend. Where conditions are warm and dry Mycoplasma can survive up to four months. In cold, dry weather it is estimated that the organism probably dies within 1 month. The ideal control, therefore, is time.  
  
If time is not available, power washing at high temperature will kill the organism. This is a practical alternative for hutches. However, in a partially-occupied calf shed, power washing is very likely to spread Mycoplasma to many other calves.
- **In calf housing, maintain a good volume of air exchange throughout the year.**  
We are almost certain to have some Mycoplasma organisms discharged by non-infected carrier calves. When the concentration of Mycoplasma gets high enough, calves with low immune defenses will develop the disease. The rule is ventilate, ventilate, ventilate. Lots of fresh air dilutes the airborne pathogen load and helps prevent all respiratory illnesses.

For more background information go to (4 pages, all text) :

[https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/48369/404-038\\_pdf.pdf;sequence=1](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/48369/404-038_pdf.pdf;sequence=1)