

Prevent Pneumonia in Young Calves

One cause of pneumonia in young calves is fluids in the windpipe (trachea).

We don't have much control over calves sucking in fluids during the birthing process. But as newborn calves we have a lot of control. Their first feeding of colostrum can cause problems.

Match feeding rate to swallowing rate

The problem?

- If we bottle feed colostrum it's important to use a nipple that matches the calf's ability to nurse. A few calves can chug a two-quart bottle of colostrum in just a few minutes. They are not the ones that have problems with a heavy-flow or cutout nipple.
- Many calves cannot swallow large enough quantities of fluids to keep up with the flow from a cutout nipple. Each time they try to catch a breath a bit of colostrum slips into their windpipe. By the time the bottle is gone a harmful amount of liquid has entered the trachea. This condition causes aspiration pneumonia.

The solution?

- Have more than one nipple available for feeding colostrum. It's fine to have a cutout one for the chuggers. It's better to have one or more slower nipples that match the nursing abilities of slower calves. A couple extra nipples are much less expensive than medication for pneumonia calves.

Use tube feeders properly

The problem?

- If we use an esophageal tube feeder it's very important to use it properly. When the tube is being inserted it is essential that it contains no liquid. Zero. Zip. None. Nada.

- The entrances to both the esophagus and trachea are right next to each other in the back of the mouth. If we start dumping liquids from the tube before it goes into the esophagus they may leak into the windpipe.
- The same rule applies to removing the tube. Let it drain completely before pulling it out. Fluid leaked into the mouth inserting or removing the tube can allow a harmful amount of liquid to enter the trachea. This condition causes aspiration pneumonia.

The solution?

- Make sure that everyone that tubes calves understands the “how” and “why” of inserting and withdrawing of the esophageal tube.
- Emphasize the need for no liquid in the tube either going in or coming out. A couple of extra minutes training everyone are much less expensive than medication for pneumonia calves.