

CALVING EASE

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Sam Leadley, Attica Veterinary Associates

Timeliness of Treating Pneumonia

All of us have heard the advice, “If you are going to treat a sick calf, do it right.” Doing it “right” usually brings to mind using the proper drug at the prescribed dose for the required duration of treatment. However, did the phrase, “Do it right,” make you think of timeliness of diagnosis and treatment?

Indicators that treatment is not timely

The severity of symptoms at first treatment is the most obvious indicator of treatment timeliness. Consider all the calves you have treated for pneumonia in the past week, month or three months. If the majority of them had heavy nasal discharge, coughing, and temperatures above 103.5° accompanied by shallow breathing and elevated respiration rate, then diagnosis and treatment was probably later than desirable.

A second indicator is clustering of treatments. Go back to your treatment records. Do your records show that you frequently treat two or more calves on the same day (first treatments) and none on many other days? This often happens when we spot one seriously sick calf. While treating her we have an opportunity to observe other nearby calves. Among them are previously unobserved treatable cases.

Published reports comparing clinician versus calf raiser diagnosis rates for pneumonia show significant differences. That is, calf raisers diagnosed pneumonia later or completely missed diagnosing cases when calves had been diagnosed as clinically ill with pneumonia by the veterinarian.

Doing a better job of diagnosis and treatment

The first step toward improvement is to make a commitment to observe all the calves. Our tendency as care givers is to be in hurry. However, a small amount of time spent observing calves at feeding time can save many hours of treatment time later. It is important to remember that in just a few seconds if we know what to look for, we can make a valid assessment of a calf’s well being. Actually, anytime you are working with the calves (feed grain or water, bedding) this is an opportunity to watch for discharges from the nose or eye and/or lack of usual energetic behavior.

We are watching for:

- Calf is slow to get up to eat.
- Calf does not immediately begin eating vigorously.
- Calf lingers in the milk bucket longer than others.
- Calf has colored or opaque nasal discharge.
- Calf coughs.

In whatever way fits our management system, when we see any of these symptoms those calves need to be marked for an additional health exam after feeding.

The second step toward better and timelier diagnoses of respiratory illness is to know what to observe and how to interpret what we see. A practical on-farm diagnostic guide is available at the University of Wisconsin Vet School address: www.vetmed.wisc.edu/dms/fapm/fapmtools/calves.htm

Once at this web site, scroll down to calves and click on “Calf Respiratory Health Scoring Chart.” The Calf Health Scoring Criteria give standards for assessing calf health. Especially helpful are the color pictures showing nasal discharge. The “normal” picture shows nothing more than a small amount of thin, clear, water-like liquid. In contrast, the picture for the most seriously ill calf shows a lot of discharge from both nostrils that is thick, opaque and discolored. The chart minus the pictures is:

0	1	2	3
Rectal Temperature			
100-100.9	101-101.9	102-102.9	≥ 103
Cough			
None	Induce single cough	Induced repeated coughs or occasional spontaneous cough	Repeated spontaneous coughs
Nasal Discharge			
Normal serous discharge	Small amount of unilateral cloudy discharge	Bilateral, cloudy or excessive mucus discharge	Copious bilateral mucopurulent discharge
Eye Scores			
Normal	Small amount of ocular discharge	Moderate amount of ocular discharge	Heavy ocular discharge
Ear Scores			
Normal	Ear flick or head shake	Slight unilateral droop	Head tilt or bilateral droop

Dr. McGuirk suggests assigning number values between “0” and “3” to your observations. When she gets a score of “Four” she marks this calf for observation the next day. A score of “five” rates immediate treatment. The most significant value of Dr. McGuirk’s observation guide is the benefit of achieving timeliness of treatment. Not to be undervalued, however, is achieving consistency of observations from day-to-day and among caregivers.

If you know of someone that doesn’t currently receive **Calving Ease** but would like to, tell them to **WRITE** to **Calving Ease**, 11047 River Road, Pavilion, NY 14525 or to **CALL** 585-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or **FAX** (585-591-2898) or **e-mail** sleadley@frontiernet.net. Back issues may be accessed on the Internet at www.atticacows.com, click on the Resources menu, select Calf Management Newsletter.

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