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Management tips – The little things are the big things!

Navel and umbilical cord disinfection - Another small thing that can have significant effects on calf health.

Next to excellent colostrum management, properly disinfecting the navels and umbilical cord of newborn calves can have a significant impact on calf health! The umbilical cord represents the connection of the developing calf in utero. Upon entering the calf's body, it proceeds directly to the liver. Establishment of bacteria in the cord can have a drastic impact on the calf's health.

There are two purposes for this procedure.

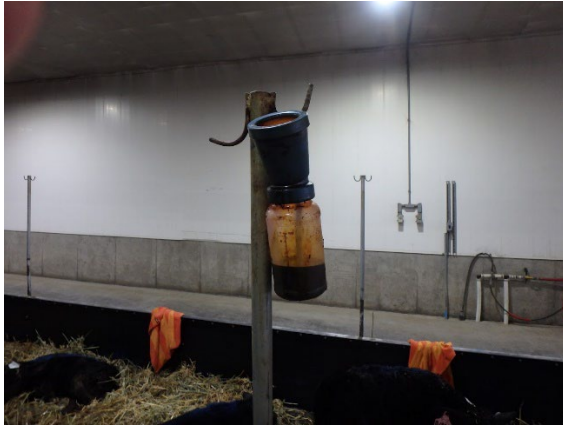
- First, we want to disinfect the navel. Immediately after birth, the navel can become contaminated with microorganisms in the environment. Navel dipping should kill these organisms.
- Second, we want to dry the navel as quickly as possible so that it is no longer a suitable growth area for bacteria.

It all sounds very simple but there are several key things to remember.

- 7% tincture of iodine continues to be the product of choice. It is a highly effective disinfectant, and it encourages rapid drying for the navel. It may not be as readily available, and it may be more expensive, but it is by far worth the investment.
- Be careful to examine the labels of other teat dip products to assure that they contain 7% iodine. Some products may look like the 7% iodine and may use confusing labeling but may contain significantly less iodine.
- Make sure that you get total coverage of the cord and navel stump. This may be achieved with a spray bottle or dip container. Dipping is most effective. However, make sure that the dip cup does not become excessively contaminated with dirt or other organic matter.
- Disinfecting excessive amounts of skin around the navel stump is not necessary. It's expensive and it also can cause excessive skin irritation.
- Examine navels every day and continue to re-dip them if they have not dried up.

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Contaminated navel dip cup



Excessive use of navel dip.

The impact of improper sanitation of the umbilical cord and the navel can have serious impacts on calf health. Bacteria can rapidly ascend the umbilical cord and enter the body where they can cause systemic infection or inflammation of the joints (joint ill). The front knees and stifle joints will most frequently be involved in these cases. Unfortunately, recovery from this infection of the joints is rarely successful and the animal may be culled prematurely or lame for the rest of their lives.

Develop and implement protocols to assure prompt dipping of the umbilical stump and navel as soon as possible birth.