



Johne's Disease/ Colostrum Management

The first few weeks of a calf's life are critical for the control of Johne's Disease, as young animals are most susceptible to MAP infection (the bacteria that causes Johne's).

Typically, cattle acquire Johne's disease as young calves when they are exposed MAP. The time taken before an infected animal shows signs of disease varies greatly, although it usually takes several years. If an animal is infected with a large amount of bacteria, then disease can occur more quickly. Cows that are apparently healthy but infected can shed the MAP bacteria in their dung, colostrum and milk (and also pass it to their unborn calves), so the disease can spread silently without the herdowner being aware of the issue.

For these reasons, preventing faecal contamination of colostrum, milk and the young calf's environment can make a significant difference to calf health and the future wellbeing of the herd. Some common management practices, including the feeding of pooled colostrum or milk to calves, and leaving calves with their dam in the calving pen can increase the risk of infection. These practices should be avoided as much as possible.

Improving calf rearing practices to manage and prevent the spread of Johne's disease has benefits for calf health overall, resulting in fewer sick calves, especially reducing the prevalence of calf scour.

The following steps can help:

- Calve all test positive cows in a dedicated area away from where the rest of the herd calves.
- Ensure the calving area is as clean as possible to avoid dung contaminating any surfaces that the calf will come into contact with and that cows will lie on.
- Ensure all calves receive adequate good quality colostrum (usually 3 litres within 2 hours of birth from the dam's first milk (3-2-1)).
- Only feed colostrum and milk from test negative cows. In general, it is best to feed colostrum from a calf's own mother, unless she is test-positive.
- Ensure that the cow's udder is clean before collecting colostrum. Wash hands before collection and wash utensils between use.
- Remove calves from the calving pen as quickly as possible (ideally within 15 minutes) i.e. to an area where they are not exposed to adult cow dung.
- In infected herds or herds of unknown status, putting calves onto good quality Calf Milk Replacer may reduce the risk of transmission of infection.
- Keep clothing clean. If dung from test-positive animals accidentally contaminates buckets or equipment, exposed calves will have a much greater risk of exposure to infection.
- Ensure you have emergency colostrum available taken from cows that have repeatedly tested negative for Johne's Disease and label it with the date and the cows' IDs.