

~Dairy Details~

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Navel infections

Navel infections in calves are a pesky and sometimes common problem found on many farms. Just like any illness, navel infections can cause calves to fall behind on the growth curve, leading to lower productivity or they can cause death, which costs the producer money. In this article, learn what navel infections are and what causes them, treatment strategies, and most importantly how to prevent them from happening.

What is a navel infection and what causes them?

A navel infection occurs when the calf's umbilical cord is exposed to bacteria shortly after birth. A newborn calf's wet umbilical cord is a perfect opportunity for these bacteria to make their way up into the calf's body. Most calves with navel infections will have a large lump filled with pus where the umbilical cord was attached to the calf's body (see picture to right). This lump will usually be warm and often painful. The most important thing to know when diagnosing a navel infection is whether or not the lump is REDUCIBLE. This means you can't push the lump up into the calf's belly. If you can reduce the lump into the calf's belly, this means the calf most likely has a hernia. A hernia is where there is a hole in the belly where intestines can poke through. These almost always occur secondary to a navel infection that occurred earlier in life. It's not uncommon for these infections to spread to other parts of the body other than the navel area. Some calves will also have large swollen joints as well.



Treatment

Once you are certain the calf has a navel infection and not a hernia, you can pursue treatment for these calves. Many of these infections, especially if they haven't spread to other parts of the body, respond well to antibiotic treatment. It is also recommended to treat these calves with some sort pain and inflammation relief such as intravenous Flunixin or oral Meloxicam. Work with your veterinarian to pick a treatment that works best for your farm.

Prevention

Although most farms will come upon a calf with a navel infection every once in a while, there are three easy steps that can be taken to prevent navel infections in your calves and keep money in your pocket.

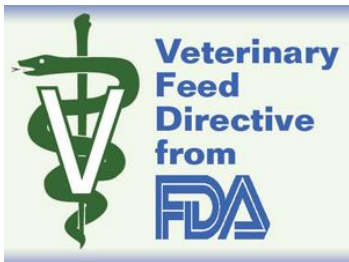
1. **Colostrum:** Since baby calves are born with no immunity getting 1 gallon of clean, high quality colostrum is critical to preventing navel infections and other diseases. When calves do not get an adequate amount of colostrum after birth this is called "Failure of Passive Transfer". If you would like to know if your colostrum management is where it should be, we can test this by running Serum Total Proteins on baby calves. Ask one of our veterinarians if you are interested in this.



2. **Cleanliness:** Keep maternity areas as clean as possible, with regular cleaning and new bedding being added. It's also important to keep calf housing as clean and dry as possible. This reduces the amount of bacteria that the calf's umbilical cord is exposed to.
3. **Navel Dip:** Dipping a calf's umbilical cord ASAP after birth and twice daily for the first couple days of life helps disinfectant the umbilical cord and helps to dry it out. Once the cord is dry, it is much more difficult for bacteria to penetrate the cord and cause an infection. Although it may be tempting, do not cut the calf's umbilical cord at birth. Cutting the umbilical cord at birth, will actually increase the risk for an umbilical infection since it opens up more of a pathway for bacteria to enter. Although there are many different types of naval dip products available, not all products are created equal. 7% tincture iodine solution has been the gold standard for dipping calf navels for many years. The only other product that has any research to back up its use is Navel Guard, which was just as effective in preventing naval infections as 7% iodine in a University of Minnesota study.



Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) Info Meeting



With the new Veterinary Feed Directive taking affect January 1st, we want our clients to be up to date and prepared for some of the changes that will be coming. The new rules will affect you if you are currently feeding any antibiotic in your feed for heifers and any antibiotics in milk for calves. We are planning a meeting for November (meal will be included) with the date yet to be determined. We would appreciate your input in what time of day works best for you. Please let one of our veterinarians or our office staff know your input. Stay tuned for more details.

Polymast Available This Month

Polymast is a "new" mastitis tube that will be launched by Beohringer Ingelheim this month. Polymast isn't actually a new mastitis tube at all, but is the mastitis tube formally called "Hetacin K", now just with a new name. Contact our office if you would like to place an order.

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