

Winter Teat Care

by Megan Weisenbeck, DVM, Northern Valley Dairy Production Medicine Center
www.dairymed.com | www.facebook.com/northernvalleydairy

It is only mid-December, yet we have already experienced weather which can be detrimental to teat skin health. Below-freezing temperatures and wind speeds above 5 mph can cause dehydration, chapping, cracking, frostbite, and freezing of teats. Damaged teat skin harbors bacteria, so cows suffering from these conditions are at high risk of mastitis, especially mastitis caused by bacteria which normally live on teat skin, such as *Streptococcus*, *negative-coagulase Staphylococcus*, or *Staphylococcus aureus*.

The main objective in prevention of weather-related teat damage is to reduce exposure to harsh environmental conditions. Provide windbreaks if cows must go outside, especially along walkways that cows use to return to the barn from the parlor. On windy days, keep barn curtains and doors closed to prevent drafts. Maintain bedding so that cows rest on a dry surface.

Choosing to not post-dip in extreme conditions to avoid freezing teats can put cows at greater risk of frostbite and mastitis. Using a germicidal post-dip is critical in preventing infection with pathogens cows are exposed to during milking. Furthermore, the milk residue left on teats after milking freezes much faster than post-dip, meaning cows would be at a higher risk of frostbite!

Winter teat dips are high emollient post-dips meant to reduce the risk of freezing and dehydration. Due to their high cost, a good strategy is to decide on a day-to-day basis if conditions are harsh enough to warrant their use, for example, when it is below 25°F or cows are outside in above 5 mph wind.

Happiest of holidays to all of you this season!