



Dairy Details

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Editor: Lindsey Borst DVM

NORTHERN VALLEY DAIRY PRODUCTION MEDICINE CENTER

Always be prepared! What you need to make an Emergency Calf Resuscitation Kit

A couple weeks ago, just when I was thinking about heading to bed, I get a phone call from my husband who went outside to check on a heifer that was calving. He said the calf wasn't breathing well and asked if I could lend a hand. So, I rush out to the barn to check the calf and ran back to the barn to get some clean towels. We rub the calf for a couple minutes, but she still had poor breathing. So, I ran back to the barn and grab our calf resuscitator, which I forgot on my first trip to the barn. By running back and forth to the barn 5 times for several different things to try and save this calf, I wasted a lot of precious time that may or may not have saved the calf; we'll never know. The first thing I said to my husband after we got done was "Tomorrow, I'm going to make us an emergency calf resuscitation kit, because that was a stupid number of trips back and forth!"

Every cattle farmer, whether you're dairy or beef or big or small, should have some basic supplies on hand for the type of situation I described above. You may only need to use it once a year, if that, but saving one calf will be worth having a few things organized in one place for you to grab quickly.

Along with general calving assistance supplies (OB sleeves, disinfectant, lube, chains, and a pail of water) have a kit with the following items ready to grab:

Emergency Calf Resuscitation Supplies:

- Towels
- Calf resuscitator
- Large syringe for cold water
- Small ~20 gauge needle to stimulate respiration
- 100 ml bottle of sodium bicarbonate, 60 cc syringe, 2 in X 14 g needle
- Dopram, 3 cc syringe, small ~20 gauge needle



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Calf Resuscitation Tips: How to use your emergency kit

- After you've sat the calf up on its chest in the correct position (see picture below), begin vigorously rubbing the calf from rump to head. This stimulates the calf's respiratory muscles.
- Calf resuscitator tools can have two purpose; one is to aspirate or suck fluid, etc. out of the calf's airway and the other is to provide oxygen to the calf. When trying to give oxygen to the calf, it is important to close off the calf's esophagus by putting pressure on the left side of the calf's neck (see picture below). This will keep all the air from going into the calf's stomach. You can buy calf resuscitators for ~\$125.
- A syringe full of really cold water can be squirted into the calf's ear.
- Calves' have an acupuncture point in the middle of their nose (see picture, stick needle where star is) that stimulates breathing. Stick a 20 or 22 gauge needle in this point.
- Calves that had a difficult birth are often acidotic when they are born (meaning their blood pH is lower than normal) which can cause respiratory depression. Large amounts (~60 cc) of IV sodium bicarbonate can correct this. Don't let IV'ing a new born calf scare you. Wet, slimy calves are easier to give an IV to than you think! Ask your veterinarian if you'd like some training in giving calves intravenous medications.
- Dopram is a prescription medication that can stimulate respiration. Discuss its usage with your veterinarian.



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2

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