

MANGING CALF REARING DURING COVID-19

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Calf rearing on any dairy farm can be demanding. It requires attention to detail, especially during the first month of an individual calf's life. This is when neonatal disease risk is highest and feeding practices are being established to set up each animal for a healthy and productive future.

Calf rearing tasks are, at a minimum, daily jobs. They cannot be easily deferred in the face of changing circumstances. With this in mind, it is important to have a plan to protect calf rearing activities from any impact that COVID-19 may have on your farm operations.

Stopping the spread of COVID-19 during the calf rearing period

- Wear disposable gloves (if available) during all calf rearing tasks, especially feeding
- Sanitise gloves with 70% alcohol/other disinfectant between tasks and wash hands regularly
- Only involve more than one person in calf rearing where workload makes this a necessity
- Maintain physical distance during rearing tasks – divide pens between people so that each member of the team has sole responsibility for a pen or group of pens
- Do not share protective clothing or boots – clean and disinfect after each session
- Where possible, have separate calf rearing equipment for each team member (feeders, mixing equipment, ear tag applicators etc) or clean and disinfect equipment between users
- Quarantine or disinfect all deliveries required for calf rearing – let any container of supplies sit for 7 days or apply chemical disinfectant
- Have minimal entry and exit points to make cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces (such as gates) easier.

Calf rearing options where the farm workforce is reduced

Should your farm workforce be compromised by COVID-19 (self-isolation or infection) consider the following options to manage the daily calf rearing workload:

- Have routine calf rearing procedures clearly documented so that care can be provided by any team member when required
- Where calf feeding happens twice daily, consider shifting to once daily for a short period – reserve this practice for calves older than 14 days and maintain per calf daily allowance
- Consider weaning calves earlier – ensure adequate concentrate consumption to minimise effects on growth rates
- Consider methods to streamline the mixing of milk replacer powder if this has not already been done (changing to whole milk for a period may also be an option)
- Consider methods to streamline any tasks which are out of routine (eg: treating sick calves)
- Consider using external contractors (e.g. for disbudding). Ensure all service providers apply COVID-19 prevention strategies.

Many of the strategies described on this page will also lessen the risk of neonatal calf diseases (such as scours) as disease transmission prevention steps apply to many types of pathogens.

Useful resources:

dairyaustralia.com.au/c19
[Disinfectant for use on dairy farms during COVID-19](#)

dairyaustralia.com.au
[Rearing Healthy Calves 2nd Edition](#)