

Tube feeding colostrum to calves

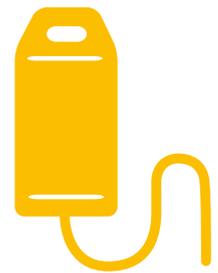
Proper care of newborn calves is critical for their long term health and survival. If a calf is unable to suckle a bottle, or consume the full amount of colostrum, then a stomach tube should be used. This is a skilled technique which requires training to ensure the correct placement of the tube.

Preparation

You will need

- Feeding tube (plus spare)
- Colostrum warmed to 38°C, at least 3 litres
- Marking equipment either pen or tape

- Before feeding any colostrum to the calf make sure all equipment has been thoroughly cleaned and is in good working order
- Sharp edges or disintegrating rubber can harbour bacteria and may damage the calf's mouth.

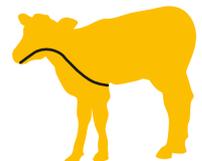


Handling the calf

- An easy way to handle the standing calf is to back the calf into a corner with one hand under its muzzle to keep its head and neck upright
- Minimise stress to other animals in the pen by working quietly and calmly
- If carrying out this task within the calving pen be aware of the cow's maternal instinct to protect her calf

- Before inserting the tube ensure it is the right length for that calf. The tube should be measured from the tip of the calf's nose to the point of the elbow behind the front leg and this point marked.

Avoid tubing calves which are lying down as milk can enter the lungs causing death.

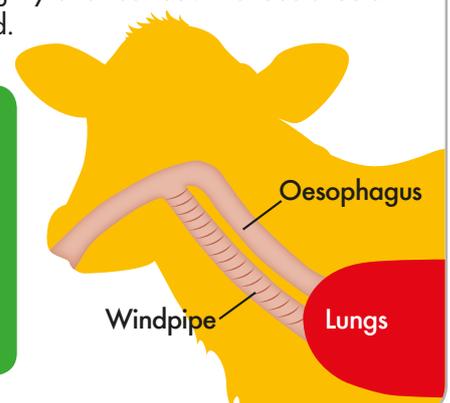


Inserting the tube

- Before inserting the tube into the calf's mouth moisten the tube with either warm water or colostrum
- Raise the calf's head and squeeze the sides of the mouth gently to open its mouth
- Slowly push the tube over the tongue to the back of the mouth
- The tube should enter the oesophagus which is directly above the windpipe. Extreme care is needed to ensure the tube enters the oesophagus and not the windpipe

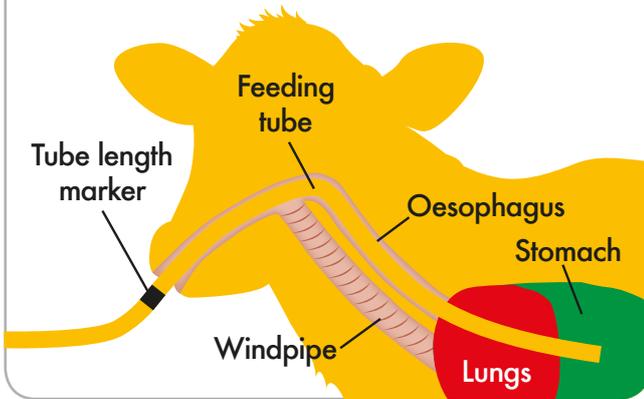
- Stop immediately if you feel any resistance - pull the tube out slightly and redirect. The tube should never be forced.

Once in the correct place the calf should appear comfortable and be swallowing.



Checking placement

- The windpipe is naturally a harder structure with rings obvious to the touch while the oesophagus is a softer collapsible structure
- When the tube is in the correct position it will inflate the oesophagus meaning that both structures can be felt.



Removal of the tube

- Once the colostrum is finished kink the tube and withdraw it in one swift movement.

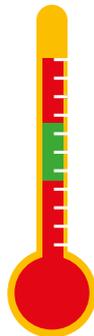
Removing the tube prematurely, whilst there is still liquid in the bag/tube may cause colostrum to enter the lungs.

Cleaning the equipment

- Immediately after use, the feeding tube should be rinsed then thoroughly cleaned and disinfected
- Hang the tube in a clean dry environment so it can drain and dry.

Administer colostrum

- When the calf is comfortable and you are happy with the position of the tube the colostrum can be introduced
- The liquid should be fed at body temperature of 38°C
- Control the flow rate of the colostrum by raising and lowering the bag
- Keeping the bag low will be more comfortable for the calf.



Feed the colostrum at a slow rate to ensure the calf regurgitates less.

Dehydrated calves

Once this technique is mastered it can also be used to give electrolyte fluid to dehydrated calves and older animals.

For more information on calf management, please visit: www.dairyco.org.uk/calves

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