

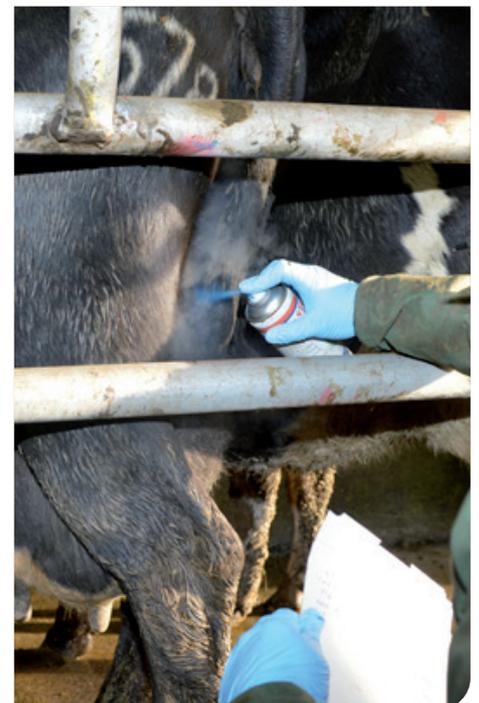
# Hygiene, Hygiene, Hygiene!

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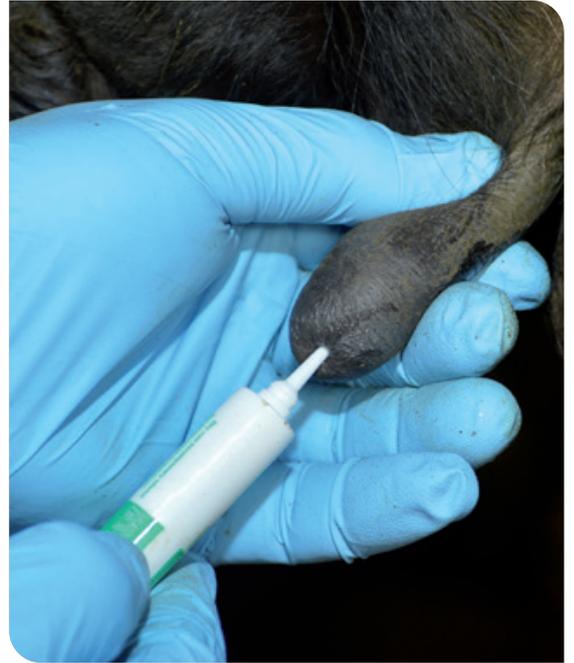
Last month I outlined the importance of preparing for drying off in advance of the actual day and highlighted the tasks that need to be done beforehand. Here I will focus on the main points to remember on the day of dry off. It is very important to take your time and have sufficient help available to ensure it is done as safely and hygienically as possible. New legislation will become law in January 2022, which will prohibit the 'preventive' use of antibiotics. This will mean that many cows will no longer have the safety net of an antibiotic at drying off and will be relying on teat sealer alone, hence the importance of hygiene, which cannot be over-emphasised. We should use this drying off event as an opportunity to prepare for this change.

Firstly, we need to define what we mean by hygiene as everybody can have different standards! Inserting intramammary tubes should be carried out as a sterile procedure, which is difficult to achieve as the parlour is not a sterile environment. A good hygiene standard to consider, and one which most of you will have experienced, is to think about the level of cleaning and sterilisation that a cow undergoes before a caesarean section. If the procedure was done without adequate preparation of the surgical site, then this would certainly lead to an infection post-surgery. The same could be said for tubing cows without sterilising the teats properly first. It is so easy to introduce bacteria into the teat end if it is not disinfected properly or if the tip of the tube has been contaminated. Infection from these environmental bacteria can cause severe mastitis and may even result in death in some situations.

To keep things as sterile as possible, more than one person is often needed to do the job well. Don't forget to mark cows before treatment, to avoid any mistakes afterwards. Those administering the tubes should be adequately trained and have experience and good technique. It is a good idea to have one person in charge of tubing to eliminate the risk of human error. Keep the number of cows to be treated after milking to a manageable number, approx. 20 per person. It will take between 5 and 7 minutes to dry off a cow correctly and if cows spend too long waiting

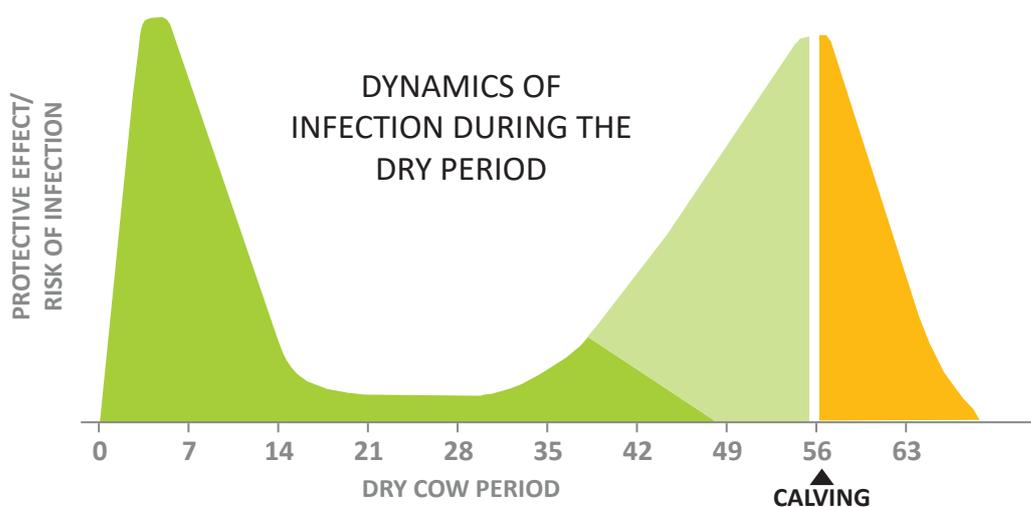


in the parlour, they will naturally create a lot of faeces, increasing the risk of environmental contamination. It is important when sterilising the teats to start with the furthest away teat first and when tubing to begin with the nearest teats; this eliminates the risk of contaminating the teats by accidentally brushing off them with your arm. Some people prefer, if using both antibiotic and sealer, to give both tubes to one teat before moving on to the next, rather than treating all teats with the antibiotic tubes first and then the sealers. It really doesn't matter which system you use as long as you stick to one to avoid confusion, and make sure that your goal is to minimise the risk of contamination. Remember that teat sealers are not massaged into the udder like antibiotic treatments. They must sit in the lower part of the teat to create the seal. This is achieved by gently squeezing the top of the teat where it attaches to the udder, to close it, ensuring the sealer remains in the canal. Sometimes teat sealers can be difficult to



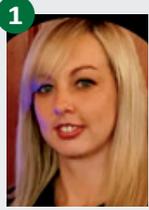
administer. Do not be tempted to warm tubes in a bucket of water as water-borne bacteria can cause serious cases of mastitis. Instead place the bucket of teat sealers in a warm room overnight or place sealers within a dry bucket and then stand this bucket containing the tubes in a bucket of warm water. Make sure cows can stand in a clean yard for at least half an hour afterwards.

Finally, the importance of good hygiene during the dry period should not be forgotten. Cows are very susceptible to picking up new infections during the dry period but especially in the first 2 weeks after drying off until the teats have sealed properly and in the 2 weeks prior to calving. They need to be monitored closely and regularly for any signs of infection, during these high-risk times.



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