

COMMON PROBLEMS AT DRYING-OFF

QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED BY FARMERS



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1. **What if a cow has too much milk, should I still dry off abruptly?**

Yes, abrupt dry-off is always recommended. Do not skip days and preferably do not skip milkings. If cows are producing more than 12 litres per day, take steps such as reducing the plane of nutrition for the 5 to 7 days prior to dry off. Animal welfare guidelines require that water is always available.

2. **What if the tube is dirty, can it be cleaned off with surgical spirits?**

No, the risk of introducing bacteria into the quarter is very high, with serious consequences, so any tube that has been dropped or is dirty should be discarded.

3. **What if the cow is nervous, jumpy or 'giddy', wanting to get out of parlour and raising her tail? Can she get antibiotic dry cow treatment, just in case she gets infected?**

Under the new Veterinary Medicines Regulation, the decision to prescribe antibiotic dry cow treatment for an individual cow must be based on evidence of infection. Thus personality doesn't justify treatment! Make sure that you have help available and appropriate restraint, to ensure operator and cow safety and to minimise contamination.

4. **What if my herd has a high SCC? Will that be a barrier to implementing a selective drying off strategy?**

While herds with a higher SCC are considered higher risk when implementing selective drying off, the new regulations will apply to all herds. All herds will have some animals that are not infected, and therefore do not require antibiotic dry cow treatment. Herds with a high SCC should work with their veterinary practitioner and their other advisors to put an effective mastitis control plan in place, to reduce their risk for the future.

5. **What if the SCC rises in the next lactation?**

Research has shown that while selective drying off can be adopted very effectively, and significantly reduce the amount of antibiotic we use on farm, the SCC of individual animals and the herd may rise slightly as a result. This is because some bacteria, which are considered insignificant but usually eliminated by antibiotic dry cow therapy, can persist in the udder. It is important to distinguish between a small increase in the cow's SCC and a new infection (generally indicated by an SCC greater than 200,000 cells/mL). This can be done by reviewing the dry period performance using milk recording results and farm records. The first milk recording of the season needs to be within the first 60 days of the lactation, to provide the necessary information.

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6. **What if I'm worried about my teat sealing technique?**

Talk to your veterinary practitioner or other advisors about your drying off process, for feedback and training if necessary for you and farm staff. Consider getting someone to video you drying off so you can identify areas for improvement. Check out the AHI website for resources, such as the CellCheck Farm Guidelines and Tubing Flyer. The dry period performance tables on your CellCheck Farm Summary Report will also give an indication of how successful your drying off and dry period management has been in the past.

7. **What if we're not using the best tube for the infection in our herd?**

Discuss your product choice with your veterinary practitioner. Reviewing the dry period performance on your CellCheck Farm Summary Report, as well as previous antibiotic responses in your herd and culture and susceptibility results are important parts of this discussion. It is also important to consider the animal's history, as chronically infected cows may not respond to antibiotic therapy and may need to be culled.

8. **What if a cow has been dried off a few days, that got antibiotics and teat seal, and is still running milk?**

Make sure that she is in a clean, dry environment to minimise the risk of exposure to bacteria. It is not recommended to re-tube her, due to the risk of introducing infection into the quarter. If this is a common problem, you may need to re-evaluate the production levels and related nutrition of cows, in preparation for drying off. You should also re-assess your technique for infusing teat seal, in particular ensuring that you are correctly pinching the base of the teat where it joins the udder, before and during infusion, and not massaging the product up into the quarter.

9. **What if there is air in the teat sealant tube? Should I squeeze it out?**

No, tubes should be used as per the manufacturer's recommendations, and air is not believed to be a problem. Trying to dispel any air could result in wasting some of the product. In addition, the longer the product is uncapped, the more risk there is of contamination of the tip.

10. **What if the teat sealant is hard to squeeze out?**

If teat sealant tubes are cold or kept in cold conditions they may be hard to infuse. Tubes can be warmed by placing the bucket of tubes into a bucket of warm water, or keeping the tubes in an inside pocket. Do not place the tubes directly in warm or hot water, as this can be a source of contamination.

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11. What if I get a sore back and am tired after tubing?

You may be trying to dry off too many at a time! In order to dry off the last cow as well as you did the first one, do not try and dry off more than 20 cows per person in a day. Take a break or have breakfast before starting the job.

12. What if I don't have enough cubicles?

Ideally there should be 110 cubicles for every 100 cows, to allow for normal cow behaviour. Having sufficient winter housing is a key component to preventing new infections over the dry period, so that cows have a clean and comfortable place to lie, with minimal infection pressure. A short term solution may be to arrange some overflow winter housing, for some groups of animals.

13. What if I have identified *Strep agalactiae* in my herd, should I give them all dry cow antibiotic?

Strep agalactiae is rarely identified nowadays in Irish dairy herds, and accounts for less than 1% of pathogens identified by laboratories. There is no justification for preventative use of antibiotic, regardless of the pathogens previously identified within the herd. Dry cow antibiotic must be prescribed on the basis of individual cow information demonstrating evidence of infection.

14. What if a cow has damaged teat skin, or warts, should I give her dry cow antibiotic?

These teats can be more difficult to completely sterilise, and may take more time and extra wipes to ensure that they are spotless. Dry cow antibiotic must be prescribed on the basis of individual cow information demonstrating evidence of infection.

15. What if I'm not sure where to put the cows after drying off?

Ideally put the cows outdoors on dry, clean pasture, for 3-4 days, well away from the milking herd and the milking area, so cows do not have any stimulus to let milk down. If this is not possible, then ensure that cubicles are clean and dry, and preferably away from the sights and sounds of the parlour.

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