

SERVICE YOUR SHEDS!

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As the workload eases at this time of year for both autumn and spring calving herds, it is important to use this time to review both housing and calving environments, which for autumn calving herds will be needed shortly. Review sheds to ensure that any environment your cows will be in direct contact with for the winter is fit for purpose. Make a list of what repairs need to be done: roof, cubicles, mats, concrete yards. Think back to last spring when you may have noticed rain getting in and wetting the cubicles, or a broken mat making it difficult to clean it. While these problems individually may appear minor, when they are all added together, they dramatically increase the risk of a cow getting mastitis and other diseases, as damp and dirty environments provide the perfect environment for infectious bugs to multiply.

Checklist to help review housing

- ✓ Power wash and disinfect cubicles, calving and feeding areas (see note below on effective cleaning and disinfection procedure).
- ✓ Have you enough cubicles? To allow for normal cow behaviour, you should have at least 1.1 cubicle per cow. If not, can suitable alternative housing arrangements be made? If not, perhaps there is a clean, vacant yard nearby that could be used? If your plan is to stay in dairying for the foreseeable future maybe it's a good time to have a discussion with your financial advisor about investing in a new shed, as this will take a lot of planning.
- ✓ How comfortable are the cubicles? Well-designed cubicles ensure the cows are comfortable, rarely lie on concrete and remain clean. A cow should lie down for up to 12-14 hours per day. Cubicle discomfort can reduce lying time to below 9 hours, with less rumination. Cubicle size should be 2.2-2.5 metres long (7.5-8') and 1.2 metres wide (4') depending on the size of cow and allow a forward lunging space to allow cows to get up and lie down and for neck extension to ruminate. If cubicles are too short then the cow's tails will spend most of their time sitting in muck which will mean dirty cows and more mastitis. Repair any loose cubicles, damaged mats and ensure brisket boards and head rails are in the correct position to help keep cows clean and comfortable.

- ✓ Service automatic scrapers and check if there are areas that may benefit from a new scraper being fitted. Automatic scrapers need to scrape up to 8 times a day.
- ✓ Cows are ‘wet animals’, particularly high yielding cows, losing up to 55 litres of moisture per day. Avoid a build-up of heat and moisture as damp, humid and hot conditions can predispose to mastitis, and heat stress leading to excessive standing.
- ✓ Is there adequate ventilation in your sheds? Hot air rises in cow sheds, so you can ensure enough ventilation by having adequate air inlets (through spaced side sheeting) and outlets (through roof apex). If you see condensation drips on your cows or if you cannot see the far end of a shed, ventilation may be inadequate and this will increase the risk of respiratory problems in the herd.
- ✓ Fix leaking water troughs and broken gutters and check drains. Are new or additional drains needed in areas where water or muck gathers and/or is not draining freely?
- ✓ Check all lights are working both inside and outside sheds to make it easier and safer to move and monitor cows.
- ✓ Maintenance – do you need to replace gates or repair feeding barriers or other areas of the shed? There may be a delay in getting building materials, so you may need to plan well ahead and avoid leaving it until close to housing time.

MORE INFORMATION ON SERVICING YOUR SHED



The [Winter Housing Checklist](#) is also a very useful reference to look at cow hygiene as well as housing and management practices on your farm. In addition, you may consult with your veterinary practitioner or farm advisor for more detail.



See Management Note L in the CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control, now available [here](#).

The recommended cleaning and disinfection procedure for sheds

This is an urgent task for autumn calving herds because for this procedure to be successful, sheds need adequate time livestock-free (minimum 3 months) to dry out properly, to minimise the risk of pathogens being carried over from the previous calving season.

- ✓ All dried faeces and other dirt should firstly be removed from the walls, floors, crevices and rails of the pens by power washing, before applying the disinfectant. This is an important step as the presence of dirt will prevent the disinfectant from working properly. Most pathogens, but especially those that cause cryptosporidiosis (i.e. *Cryptosporidium parvum*) can survive dehydration when in dried faeces, so any faeces remaining from the previous year's calves need to be removed.
- ✓ It is recommended to use a disinfectant from the DAFM-approved disinfectant list, and where there is a history of cryptosporidiosis on the farm, particular disinfectants need to be used e.g. amine-based, p-chloro-m-cresol, hydrogen peroxide with peracetic acid or 3% hydrogen peroxide.
- ✓ All surfaces should be thoroughly coated with an effective disinfectant. Please note the contact time for disinfectants is extremely important. For example, for many of the commercial disinfectants to work against *C. parvum* they need 2 hours of contact time (when applied to the clean surface with no organic matter). Check whichever product you are using and allow the recommended contact time.
- ✓ Apply a final rinse with water and leave the shed to dry.
- ✓ Once dry, the houses and pens should be left empty of livestock for at least 3-4 months. This last point is critical to the control and prevention of cryptosporidiosis as the lack of moisture is important in inactivating *C. parvum* oocysts.

C. parvum is also a highly infectious disease of humans and is especially dangerous for young children, immunocompromised individuals, and the elderly. Humans become infected through contact with infected animals and through ingestion of contaminated food and water. Farmers should be very careful when disposing of slurry and dung from calves that have been infected with *C. parvum*. Slurry and dung containing oocysts (the immature infectious stage of *C. parvum*) can contaminate surface and ground water. If this water is used as a source of drinking water, then there is every likelihood that humans will get cryptosporidiosis. Prevent surface and ground water contamination by only spreading slurry and dung on land during those times of the year allowed by national regulations, not spreading immediately before or after rain or on fields with a large slope and not spreading within 10m of a ditch or stream.