JOHNE'S DISEASE (JD)
PROTECTING YOUR CALVES

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This month, we are taking a deeper dive into the essential control measures you can implement to help prevent and manage Johne's Disease (JD) on your farm. Breaking the infection cycle is particularly crucial for calves intended as replacement stock.

Understanding how calves become infected is key. Large amounts of Mycobacterium avium subspecies paratuberculosis (MAP), the bacterium responsible for JD, can be shed through the dung and milk of infected adult cattle. Therefore, limiting a calf's exposure to contaminated environments during and immediately after birth is essential.

Why Calves Are Most at Risk

Calves are the most vulnerable to infection, particularly in the critical period immediately after birth. The Irish Johne's Control Programme (IJCP) emphasises the importance of providing a safe and clean environment for newborn calves to break the cycle of infection, particularly during calving time.

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Practical Steps to Reduce Infection Risk

By following these measures, herdowners can create a safer, cleaner environment for newborn calves and minimise their exposure to JD.

1. Ensure Pre-Calving Cows Are Clean

Cows with dirty coats, udders, and tails pose a greater risk of transferring faecal material to their calves and contaminating the calving area.

Management Strategies:

- Clip tails and udders well before calving to reduce contamination risks.
- Keep cows on straw or other clean bedding before they enter the calving area.
- Maintain clean coats and udders to minimize the risk of calves ingesting contaminated material while suckling or moving around the cow.

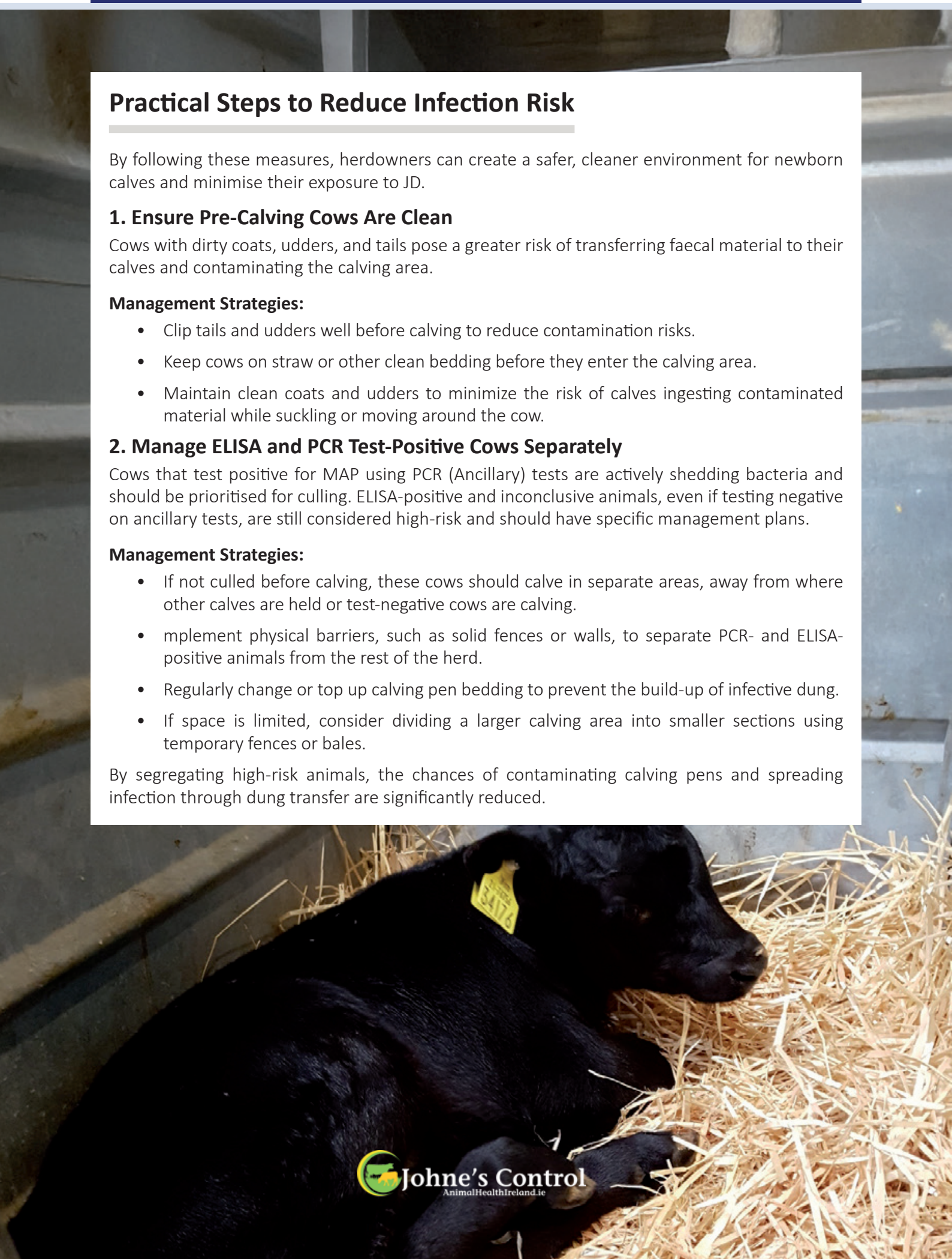
2. Manage ELISA and PCR Test-Positive Cows Separately

Cows that test positive for MAP using PCR (Ancillary) tests are actively shedding bacteria and should be prioritised for culling. ELISA-positive and inconclusive animals, even if testing negative on ancillary tests, are still considered high-risk and should have specific management plans.

Management Strategies:

- If not culled before calving, these cows should calve in separate areas, away from where other calves are held or test-negative cows are calving.
- mplement physical barriers, such as solid fences or walls, to separate PCR- and ELISA-positive animals from the rest of the herd.
- Regularly change or top up calving pen bedding to prevent the build-up of infective dung.
- If space is limited, consider dividing a larger calving area into smaller sections using temporary fences or bales.

By segregating high-risk animals, the chances of contaminating calving pens and spreading infection through dung transfer are significantly reduced.



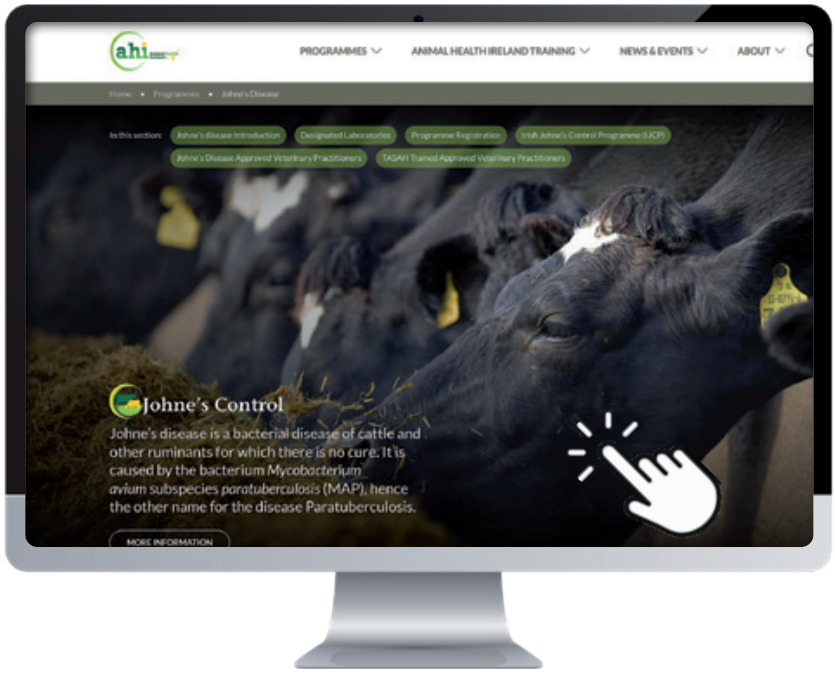
3. Remove Calves Quickly to Minimize Exposure

The longer a calf remains in the calving pen, the greater its exposure to MAP bacteria.

Management Strategies:

- Calves from PCR- and ELISA-positive cows should be removed immediately after birth to limit their risk of exposure.
- Ideally, all other calves should be removed within 15 minutes of birth to minimise contamination risks. If immediate removal is not possible, transfer them as soon as conditions allow.
- Calves born in cubicle areas or locations where pooled dung from multiple adult cattle is present are at high risk and should be considered exposed.
- Pay extra attention to future breeding stock. If possible, relocate them immediately to a separate, biosecure area away from adult cattle. Where practical, consider assigning dedicated personnel to manage these valuable animals.

Breaking the Infection Cycle - By implementing these steps, herdowners can effectively reduce the spread of JD among calves by minimising their contact with infected dung and contaminated environments.



For further guidance and resources, visit the AHI CalfCare webpage and access the 'First 3 Weeks' fact sheet for additional insights on best practices for calf health and disease prevention.