

Plan calving to protect your herd against Johne's disease

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Calving is the time when you can have most impact in protecting the health of your herd against the spread of Johne's disease. Calves are the most susceptible animals on your farm to Johne's infection, and calves' greatest risk is the dung from infected cows.

Even if Johne's disease has not been confirmed or suspected on your farm, you should use this time before calving gets under way to put in place protective measures. All farms have some chance of Johne's infection being present (although negative herd test results indicate a low risk), and the hygiene measures to reduce the risk of transmitting Johne's to calves will also reduce transmission of other diseases, improve calf and cow health and in turn enhance productivity.

If you are participating in the Irish Johne's Control Programme (IJCP), check the recommendations of your most recent veterinary risk assessment and management plan (VRAMP), for the priority actions as agreed with your approved veterinary practitioner. The latest version of your VRAMP is readily available via your Johne's screen on ICBF. If you have not yet registered with the programme, we would encourage you to do so, with financial supports available from both DAFM and your processor.

Following are some suggestions for things that all herds can do to protect your calves. Some may be impractical on some farms, and you are not expected to implement them all at once.

Suggestions include:

- Identify high-risk cows, using test results, and prioritise these cows according to their Johne's disease risk. Discuss the test results with your veterinary practitioner.
- Separate high-risk cows from the main herd for calving, so that calves from low-risk cows are not exposed to dung from high-risk cows.
- Clean cows of dung before they enter calving pens.
- Keep calving pens clean and dry. Remove dung and replace soiled bedding regularly.
- Do not use calf pens to hold sick adult cattle.
- Separate calves as soon after birth as possible, into a clean nesting area.
- Prevent manure from the calving pen and other adult facilities from getting into the calf pens; clean or use separate boots, wash hands, change soiled clothes if necessary when you enter the calf pens, or have a dedicated calf rearer.

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- Select replacement calves from low-risk cows; do not keep replacement heifer calves from high-risk cows (particularly their most recent calves).
- Collect and prepare milk and colostrum hygienically, avoiding faecal contamination.
- Ensure that calves receive colostrum – remember the Colostrum 1, 2, 3 rule: The 1st MILK, and only the first milk the cow produces, should be used to feed to the newborn calf for its first feed; Feed calves within 2 HOURS of birth as antibody absorption is highest at this time; Feed 3 LITRES to ensure the calf receives enough antibodies.
- Provide colostrum and milk, especially to calves intended to be retained as replacements or sold for breeding, from low-risk sources (individual test-negative, low-risk cows, or their own dam); preferably not from pooled colostrum or milk (even pooled from low-risk cows), and definitely not from high-risk cows.
- If possible, house calves to be retained as replacements separate from calves from high-risk cows.

Remember to put aside time after calving to review what has worked well and what needs improvement for next year. This will be an ideal time to conduct your VRAMP for 2021.

For more information on managing Johne's disease at calving, have a look at our recently produced video as part of the CalfCare Virtual Week.



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