



Navel Care for Dairy Calves

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Southwest NY Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops Program

Why is navel care important?

The navel or umbilical cord is the connection between the placenta of the dam and the fetus and nourishes the calf before they are born. At birth, the umbilical cord ruptures, leaving the umbilical cord extending through the navel. If the cord doesn't get infected, it will dry up and shrink in the next 7 to 10 days. However, before the cord is completely dried out, disease-causing pathogens from the environment can be wicked up the cord and it is our job to help the calf win this battle.

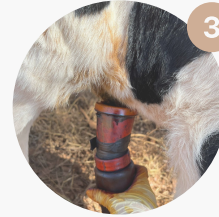
How can we help?



1 Clean and dry calving areas are the first step



2 Minimizing the calf's time in the maternity pen



3 Disinfect the umbilical cord ASAP

Photo: Rafael Azevedo

Photo: Geovanna Branquinho

Signs of navel problems at farms includes:



Navel ill



Joint ill



Sudden death with respiratory symptoms and/or scours

Measuring to Manage!

Palpate the navel 2 or 3 times during the first week of age; The general rule is that the cord should not be any bigger than your thumb should also be soft and not cause discomfort when squeezed.



If more than 1% of calves are having navel issues or you are observing calves with joint issues and/or sudden death in the first days of life, talk to your Veterinarian.



Best practices when using a dip to disinfect the umbilical cord:

1. Use gloves

Navel care solutions usually have alcohol or other caustic ingredients that cause skin irritation.



2. Dip the whole cord

Avoid the skin around it to reduce skin irritation); Avoid cutting the navel cord, if not extremely necessary; Extra tip: use a no-return dip to ensure you don't contaminate your solution.

3. Keep the solution clean:

Dirt and excessive light can reduce the efficacy of the disinfectant (specially iodine) and spread bacteria; Use an amber flask and make sure you dispose the extra solution and wash the part that comes into contact with the calf after finishing using the flask.



Photo: Rafael Azevedo

4. Have impeccable colostrum management:

Early and adequate intake of high-quality colostrum is very important to protect calves against any infections.



5. Re-dip the navel:

One application may be enough when calves are born in clean environments but disinfecting the navel a second time within the first day of life and daily after that for two additional days can help step up your navel care protocol and reduce issues.