

GUIDELINE 2

Take care with heifers

In this guideline:

- 2.1 Choose the heifer pre-calving management that is most suitable for the herd
- 2.2 Train heifers in the milking area before calving
- 2.3 Take your time to move animals into the farm dairy - don't rush
- 2.4 Attend to heifers with severe udder oedema
- 2.5 Ensure all quarters of all cows are milked out

After calving, heifers are often uncomfortable with swollen udders, or oedema, and may be more difficult to move, handle and milk out completely. For young cows calving for the first time, the milking routine is a new and different experience.

It takes about two weeks for most heifers to establish a quiet, reliable response to milking. Milking staff must be patient and as gentle as possible during this period. This is important to maximise production, minimise milking times and reduce risk of injury to milkers and animals. Extra labour may be required at calving time.



Good Read

[Technote 2 - Take care with heifers](#)

2.1 Choose the heifer pre-calving management that is most suitable for the herd.

Some practical and highly effective ways to prevent mastitis in heifers include:

- Using Internal Teat Sealant approximately 4 weeks before the planned start of calving.
- Spraying teats with normal teat disinfectant 2-3 times per week for last 3 weeks before calving.
- Picking up calves twice daily and milking animals within 9-12 hours after calving.

The choice of strategy for an individual herd will depend on:

- Gap in performance between incidence of clinical mastitis and industry targets.
- Costs, potential risks and likely benefits of each approach.
- Availability of infrastructure for safe administration of internal teat sealants to heifers pre-calving.
- Opportunities to teat spray regularly before calving.
- Labour availability to pick up newly-born calves twice per day and bring animals in to be milked.

Herds experiencing more than 16 cases of clinical mastitis per 100 heifers within the first 2 weeks of lactation (or 8 cases per 50 heifer calvings) should consider ways to reduce heifer mastitis more proactively. Discuss options and potential costs with your veterinarian.

Use of antibiotics in heifers at calving time is not recommended due to high costs and the risk of antibiotic residues in milk.



See [Technote 2](#) for more on management of heifers to reduce mastitis

2.2 Train heifers in the milking area before calving.

It takes about two weeks for heifers to familiarise themselves with the surroundings of the milking area, entry and exit routes, and to establish a quiet, reliable routine.

To maximise production and minimise risk of injury to milkers and animals, milking staff must as patient and gentle as possible during this period.

The first two weeks of milking can be made a lot easier if heifers are trained prior to calving, starting with just walking to the dairy yard and holding them for a short period, building up to turning on machines and walking them through the dairy. Take this opportunity to teat spray.

Use of an Internal Teat Sealant in heifers can also provide an opportunity to familiarise heifers with the dairy and yards 4-6 weeks before calving.



See [Technote 2](#) for more on training heifers.

2.3 Take your time moving animals into the farm dairy - don't rush.

This minimises injury to udders and teats, and contributes to cows being comfortable during milking. Encourage the co-operation of the cow by gentle animal husbandry. Don't rush.



A calm cow is a productive cow

Unexpected noise and movement can cause cows to be fearful. Fearful cows will not let down their milk. Ensure all staff follow a calm and consistent routine when handling stock.



See [Guideline 5.1](#) for more on moving heifers through the dairy.

2.4 Attend to heifers with severe udder oedema.

If heifers are tight with udder oedema prior to calving, milk them out and use saved colostrum for their calves.

If they are very uncomfortable, seek veterinary advice. Prevention is better than cure, so discuss heifer nutrition with your adviser to ensure diet does not contribute to severe oedema.



Seek advice

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Prevention is better than cure, so discuss heifer nutrition with your adviser to ensure diet does not contribute to severe oedema.

2.5 Ensure all quarters of all cows are milked out.

Ensure each cow has a milk let-down at each milking, particularly heifers. Use let-down hormone (Oxytocin) if necessary.

Avoid both over and under milking.



See [Guideline 5.4](#) for tips on establishing a good let-down response.