

Preventing Calf Pneumonia

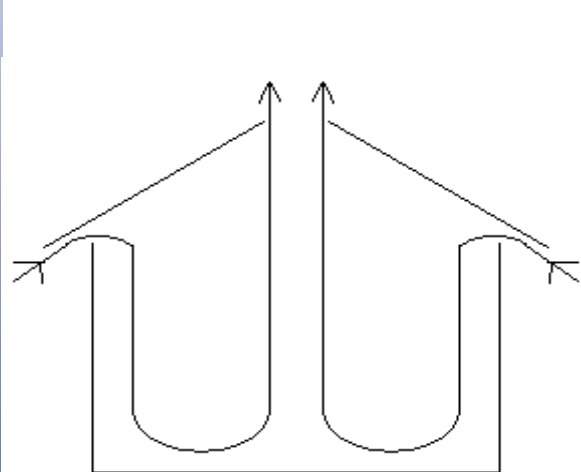
As cattle start to be brought in for the winter housing season, the number of cases of calf pneumonia normally begins to rise. The viruses that cause pneumonia spread more easily between animals while they are housed (as there is more nose to nose contact and less ventilation).

Signs of pneumonia in cattle include fast or heavy breathing, discharge from the eyes and nose, separation from the rest of the group, loss of appetite and a high temperature. As with any disease, chances of successful recovery are increased if treatment is given early in the course of the disease, and so regular checks of all stock are important.

Because pneumonia is often initially caused by a virus, antibiotic therapy alone is often unlikely to fully resolve clinical signs. It is recommended to use a NSAID drug, for example Metacam or Ketofen in combination with an antibiotic for the treatment of pneumonia. This will decrease the amount of long-term lung damage, which can result in low growth rates and recurrent pneumonia.



A typical pneumonia calf, with discharge from the eyes and nose and loss of condition



A diagram to show ideal air movement through a building. The stock in the building heat the stale air which rises and exits via an opening in the roof, and fresh air is drawn in by openings in the side of the building.

The key to managing pneumonia is prevention. The best way to minimise risk of spread is to ensure that all sheds are well ventilated without being too draughty and keeping humidity at a low level. Avoid mixing stock of different ages in a shared airspace, as older animals can often carry low levels of the pneumonia viruses without showing clinical signs. Good calf management can also go a long way in helping to prevent pneumonia occurring. Ensuring adequate colostrum intake at birth and minimising stress by not weaning, castrating, disbudding and mixing all at the same time can help the calf to fight off infection.

Vaccination against pneumonia is possible, but is likely to be less effective unless other aspects of husbandry (e.g. ventilation) have been correctly addressed.