

# **Northwest Veterinary Associates, Inc.**

**6 Fairfield Hill Road • St. Albans, Vermont 05478**

Newsletter for May 2007

## ***Treating Calf Pneumonia***

This spring we have seen some seasonal pneumonia outbreaks in groups of young calves. It isn't a surprise since we see this every transitional season (spring and fall) when the temperatures widely fluctuate. Over the past few years we have had some new therapies to use to intervene in these cases. We have had some success with Draxxin and Excede, new antibiotic choices that often work well for calf pneumonia. Nuflor and Polyflex work in some cases, too.

One of the common mistakes in treating calves for pneumonia is starting treatment too late. Often the first calf that is noticed as being sick is just the tip of the iceberg. And once she is noticed and treated, you begin to observe the entire group more closely and notice that many more are breathing a little faster or have some nasal discharge. Before long, most of the group is getting antibiotics.

What if we could get a jump on them a bit earlier? If we began therapy at the earliest signs of disease the cure rates would be better, the death rates would be lowered, and the lingering affects of damaged lung tissue would be less.

Some calf raisers are often in a hurry while doing calf chores and when that happens the more subtle signs of sickness are missed. A calf with early pneumonia may show some of these signs:

- Coughing
- Slow to get up and eat
- White or cloudy nasal discharge
- Takes longer to eat than usual
- Does not begin to eat vigorously immediately after getting up

Dr. Sheila McGuirk from the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine, has some interesting research data that shows that the calves that get pneumonia as weaned calves are often the same calves that had pneumonia as baby calves. She suggests that this is from incomplete treatment as young calves. They may have been diagnosed too late, not treated long enough, treated with an incorrect dose, or with an antibiotic that wasn't effective for that particular type of pneumonia. In order to help you avoid this pattern in your calf barn, she has developed a calf scoring system that gives you a more objective way to assess calves.

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0	1	2	3
<b><i>Rectal Temperature</i></b>			
100-100.9	101-101.9	102-102.9	>103
<b><i>Cough</i></b>			
None	Induce single cough	Induce repeated coughs or occasional spontaneous cough	Repeated spontaneous coughs
<b><i>Nasal Discharge</i></b>			
Normal clear discharge	Small amount of clear discharge from one nostril	Lots of cloudy and/or clear discharge from both nostrils	Copious pus-like discharge from both nostrils
<b><i>Eye scores</i></b>			
Normal	Small amount of eye discharge	Moderate amount of eye discharge	Heavy eye discharge
<b><i>Ear Scores</i></b>			
Normal	Ear flick or head shake	Slight one-sided droop	Head tilt or both ears droopy

When you score a calf, with a value for each of the five categories, any calf that has a total score of 4 should be carefully watched for the next 24 hours. Dr. McGuirk suggests that any calf with a 5 or more should be immediately treated. This system would encourage us to treat early in the course of the disease and enable everyone treating calves to be consistent in their decision-making.

**Prepared by Steven Wadsworth, DVM**