
Caring for a baby calf: The first 24 hours key

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How much colostrum does a baby calf need after experiencing a difficult birth?

As we move closer to spring calving season, the question has been asked how much colostrum does a baby calf need? Remember from an earlier article that the first 24 hours after birth is the critical time that calves need to ingest colostrum (mother's milk).

Calves born after dystocia (hard calving) are at a high risk of failing to receive adequate colostrum by natural suckling because of greatly decreased colostrum intake.

Calves that are born to a prolonged stage II of parturition very often suffer from severe respiratory acidosis. Acidotic calves are less efficient at absorbing colostral immunoglobulins even if artificially fed colostrum, therefore effort should be made to provide



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weak newborn calves with the best source of colostrum available via bottle suckling or tube feeding.

The amount of immunoglobulin ingested is also a major determinant of final serum immunoglobulin concentration. A practical "rule of thumb" is to feed 5 to 6 % of the calf's body weight within the first 6 hours and repeat the feeding when the calf is about 12 hours old. For an 80 pound calf, this will equate to approximately 2 quarts of colostrum per feeding. Read more about this topic in OSU Fact Sheet F-3358, Disease Protection for Baby Calves.