

## Evaluating Teat Condition

Periodic evaluation of teats in the milking parlor can help you quickly identify problems in management or procedure. Teats and teat ends can be affected by the milking process, environment, or agents applied to the teats.

Observations are best made within 30-60 seconds of milking unit removal and should include:

- Color
- Dryness
- Chapping
- Skin Damage
- Hyperkeratosis (Callous formation) of the teat orifice

**Color:** In general, the skin should be light pink after milking, however this becomes more difficult to assess in animals with black teats. Irritation of the skin is most commonly caused by products applied to the teats. Changes to teat color will not be noticeable for 2-7 days after the application of the new product. Red to blue discoloration is most likely to be caused by chemical irritation. In contrast, herpesvirus can cause thickening and blackening of the teat end similar in appearance to frostbite.

**Dryness:** The best way to evaluate the dryness of skin is by touch. It is very difficult to accurately assess dryness by visual appearance alone. Using latex gloves run your thumb up and down the surface of the skin. This can be graded from smooth (no friction from latex), to slightly rough (drag of the latex), to very rough (causing the latex to grab and pucker on your hand). The rougher the surface the dryer the skin is.

**Chapping:** Teat chaps are horizontal skin fissures caused by a poor climatic environment on abraded skin. This primarily occurs as the result of excessively drying wet teats by cold drafts or wind. Wet conditions and poor housing are common underlying causes. However, chapping can also be caused by old or poor-quality liners and aggressive teat cup removal resulting in trauma and thus chapping. When evaluating teats, you should not identify any signs of chapping. If chapping is present, re-evaluate your teat disinfection routine as well as the effectiveness of your post-dip product.

**Skin Damage:** Damage is usually caused by trauma or disease. Types of trauma include cuts, insect bites, teat suckling, environmental abrasions, sunburn, and frostbite. Cuts are most likely the result of inadequate stall size or poor hoof management causing the cow to injure her teats when getting up and down in the stall. Biting insects can leave small puncture wounds on the skin surface and can be managed with proper fly control. Abrasions are usually related to lying conditions, ie muddy or wet sandy soil.

**Hyperkeratosis:** Callous formation on the teat end/opening (aka Hyperkeratosis) is a result of the milking process. Onset and severity are influenced by milk production, the environment and milking procedure. Overmilking, excessive pulsation rates and/or creating excessive pressure in the inflations can all lead to severe levels of hyperkeratosis.