



Newborn Calf Resuscitation

I was recently at a farm doing a relatively routine calving. On arrival, there were two feet protruding from the cow's vulva. Upon further inspection, I realized these were back feet. After applying chains and a generous amount of lubrication the calf was easily delivered with a bit of help from a calf jack. When the calf hit the ground there was no movement or breathing, but I could see the calf's heart pounding out of its chest. Does this scenario sound familiar? Have you ever felt helpless as you watch a calf struggle to take its first breath? Knowing how to properly resuscitate a newborn calf can be a lifesaving skill for you and your calving team?

The first, and most important step, is placing the calf in a sternal position. (on its chest with feet extended). This allows the calf to rest in the best position for it to expand its lungs and intake oxygen. Gentle massaging and rubbing of the calf by hand or with a dry towel can also help to stimulate the calf to take its first breath. To encourage a gasping response a long piece of straw (or even your finger) can be poked inside the nostril to attempt to get the calf to inhale and cough.

Ok, so tell me something I don't know! If you suspect that the airway is blocked by fluid do **not** lift the calf up by its back legs. Although you will almost always see a clear fluid discharge from the mouth and nose, what you're seeing is stomach fluid and is not coming from the airways. Holding a calf upside down also puts pressure on the calf's diaphragm due to the weight of the viscera and intestines. This pressure is counterproductive as it makes it more difficult for the calf to expand its lungs and diaphragm.

If you are doing all of the above and are starting to feel helpless I have one more trick up my sleeve that you can try. This is the trick that saved the calf in my story. Lay the calf on its side and grasp its forearm near its armpit with one hand while wedging your fingers under the calf's rib cage with the other. Now, simultaneously lift up so that you are expanding the chest and press down firmly. Do this repeatedly. You need to perform 3 of these cycles every 10 seconds until you can hear the air coming in and out of the calf's nose. The objective is to get air into the lungs. Calves that I have delivered doing what I call "death gasps" cannot expand their chest due to fluid or other obstructions. Simply pressing down (Heimlich maneuver style) onto the chest will not do anything because the calf does not have any air in its lungs to dislodge the obstruction. Expanding the calf's chest is the most important thing you can do to give it a chance at life.

If you have questions about how to perform this technique or others please feel free to ask us! We are happy to assist you!