

Ensuring a Healthy Show Season for Your 4-H Calf

Dr. Crystal Throop

March 2016

As 4-H clubs start gearing up for another show season and participants start selecting their 2016 projects, it is important to be aware of the animal health policies put in place by 4-H Ontario in recent years. Some of you may have noticed the team of veterinarians inspecting calves on entry to the 2015 Royal Winter Fair. Their role was to enforce the policies put forth by 4-H Ontario in Document 5.7.2 under the subject "Animal Health & Safety Best Practices". Unfortunately not all entries met the requirements despite circulation of the aforementioned document to 4-H chaperones prior to the event.

The intent of the policy is to ensure that only healthy cattle are shown. As public scrutiny of the cattle industry increases over time, it is important to remember that fairs such as the Royal may be the only direct interaction a person may have with the cattle industry. Participants take great pride in the creativity of their club displays and the superior level of care provided to the animals being shown. This sends a strong positive message to the general consuming public. Having calves with visible skin lesions, signs of pneumonia, or diarrhea takes away from that positive message. Furthermore, a sick calf places the other calves at risk. Transport, mixing with other cattle, housing changes and feeding changes are all stresses that increase susceptibility to contagious diseases. The worst case scenario is that a calf becomes infected at the fair, takes the disease back to the farm and compromises the health of the herd.

The skin diseases of concern in the 4-H policy are ringworm, warts and lice. Ringworm causes circular lesions with white or grey scabs, most commonly seen on the head or neck. It is a zoonotic disease, meaning that it is transferable to humans. Ringworm is highly contagious. It can be spread by direct contact between calves or by indirect contact via shared clippers, brushes, combs and halters. Ringworm is associated with reduced growth rates and can take up to 4 months to recover from. Warts are caused by bovine papilloma virus. They may appear as raised hairless bumps, be cauliflower-like or pedunculated (above the skin on a short stalk). The first sign of warts can appear up to 2 months after exposure to the virus. New warts can continue to appear over the next few months, meaning that it is important to routinely check your calf for the appearance of new warts. Like ringworm, warts are highly contagious and can be spread by direct or indirect contact. Unlike ringworm, warts are not transferrable to humans. Lice are wingless, flattened insects that are large enough to be seen on the skin of calves. It can cause irritation to the skin, hair loss and an unthrifty appearance. Watch for calves trying to bite, scratch or rub themselves to alleviate the itch. Lice can be spread by direct and indirect contact as well.

The following are some steps that you can take to ensure a healthy show season.

- (1) When selecting your 4-H project, select one that is currently healthy. Remember that warts can be a reoccurring problem over the next few months – avoid choosing a calf that is currently infected with warts as the problem may reoccur over the show season.

- (2) Ask your veterinarian to inspect your calf early in the show season to identify and treat any health concerns as early as possible. Ideally complete the inspection before the June 1st deadline for project information sheets to give you the opportunity to switch calves without compromising your ability to compete at the Royal if an ongoing health concern is identified.
- (3) Speak with your veterinarian to develop an appropriate vaccination protocol for show animals that is compatible with the program in place for the main herd. Vaccinate your calf as recommended and keep a record of all vaccines given (including name of vaccine, date given, route of administration).
- (4) Treat calves for external (e.g. lice) and internal parasites as recommended by your veterinarian.
- (5) If your calf develops signs of illness, consult with your veterinarian prior to treatment. It is recommended to remove warts at least 3 weeks prior to the show to ensure sufficient time for healing. Calves with visible warts are not acceptable to show. Ringworm lesions will be considered acceptable only if lesions are less than 2.5cm in diameter and all lesions are completely covered by hair. Discolouration of hair or the underlying skin may be present.
- (6) Do not share equipment (halters, brushers, combs, clippers, water and feed buckets) between calves from different farms or disinfect equipment between calves if it must be shared.
- (7) Water buckets should be directly filled from a tap and not dipped out of a trough. Troughs may become contaminated with saliva or mucous, an important route of disease transmission.
- (8) Wipe down clippers and disinfect clipper blades between calves to prevent spread of ringworm and warts.
- (9) Develop a biosecurity/quarantine protocol with your veterinarian for calves upon return from a show to prevent disease transfer to other cattle.

A special thanks to the Ontario Association of Bovine Practitioners Calf Health Team of Drs. Tim Henshaw, Ann Godkin, Christie Morrow and Rex Crawford for their efforts in developing this 4-H Policy. Cattle shows are a great opportunity for the industry to interact with the public. We all need to do our part to ensure that this interaction fosters positive opinions of our industry by only exhibiting healthy cattle. It can be difficult to leave a calf at home after hours of work and preparation. However, it is in the best interest of the sick calf, the other calves at the show, the farms they come from and the industry as a whole to not bring an animal with a contagious, and in some cases zoonotic, disease to the show. For more information and pictures of acceptable and unacceptable ringworm lesions, please visit the Ontario 4-H website and view document 5.7.2.