

Top tips on reviving a new-born calf

SAC Vet Services Aberdeen recently hosted a veterinary practitioner meeting focussing on immediate care of the new-born calf.

Doctor Dai Grove-White (head of the Department of Livestock Health and Welfare, University of Liverpool) gave a brilliant presentation full of practical tips as relevant to farmers as they are to vets.

Here are my top five DO's and DON'Ts following Dai's talk:

DO

1. **Sit the calf up** on its chest with the head upright (sternal recumbency). This is the best way to help it to breath.



2. **Clear the airways** at the back of the mouth (but don't swing or hang the calf – see below). Dai uses the Emergency Aspirator pump (around £200 plus vat) available at <https://vitalograph.co.uk/product/162440/aspirator>



3. **Pour cold water in the ear** as a way of stimulating a calf after birth. Rubbing the chest may also encourage breathing.

4. **Give colostrum quickly.** If the calf is slightly dopey don't wait to see if it will suck on its own, as many will not. The dam's own colostrum should be used whenever possible, with appropriate restraint used to ensure safety. Two to three litres within 2-3 hours is a good rule of thumb for non-dairy breeds.

DON'T

1. **Move the cow at the very first signs of labour** (nesting behaviour, seeking isolation etc.). This can delay the calving and lead to slower or harder calvings.
2. **Forget hygiene and lube** if you need to intervene. Use a clean, gloved hand with plenty of lube.
3. **Hang or swing the calf by the back legs.** This causes the organs in the abdomen to compress the lungs and makes it HARDER for the calf to breathe.
4. **Ignore stillborn calves.** Investigate any calf deaths that occur within 24 hours of birth. Stillbirths can be caused by various infectious diseases, calf malformations, and slow or hard calvings. Consider submitting the calf and any placenta you can get to Aberdeen Disease Surveillance Centre.
5. **Ignore slow calving cows.** Investigate possible causes if they are occurring regularly, including excess body condition, energy deficits in the diet and macro-mineral disorders.