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Pneumonia in Calves

Pneumonia in calves, often referred to as “Enzootic Calf Pneumonia”, is a common issue for both dairy and beef producers. Pneumonia in calves is considered multifactorial and complex.

Pneumonia often begins due to a viral infection and as time goes on secondary bacterial infections occur. Stress such as overcrowding, cold weather, wet bedding, wind draughts, excess ammonia in the environment and poor ventilation can reduce the calf’s immunity and impact on the respiratory tract which in turn allows viral and bacterial infections to establish.

The table below outlines the different infectious agents that contribute to pneumonia in calves:

Viral	Bacterial	Mollicutes
Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR)	<i>Mannheimia haemolytica</i> (MH)	<i>Mycoplasma bovis</i>
BVDV	<i>Pasteurella multocida</i>	
Parainfluenza 3 (PI3)	<i>Histophilus somni</i>	
BVSV		
Paramyxovirus		

In the acute form of pneumonia, calves show the following signs:

- Increased respiratory rate (greater than 40 breaths per minute), nasal and/or eye discharge, coughing, drooping ears and a rectal temperature above 39.5°C.
- Severe cases, calves may stand with head stretched out and open mouth breathing.

A second presentation of pneumonia in calves is the chronic pneumonia “cuffing pneumonia”. This form has a more gradual in onset, generally affected calves appear to have a normal appetite but develop an increased respiratory rate, nasal discharge, and an explosive dry cough. They often fail to gain weight and become ‘ill-thrifty’.

Treatment consists of an antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and older calves may require drenching if lungworm (*Dictyocaulus viviparus*) is an issue.

Prevention involves supply adequate colostrum at birth, addressing any underlying stress factors, improve housing conditions, provision of adequate nutrition to support growth and immunity, and on some farms, vaccination may be required.

Reference material:

Parkinson, T. J., Vermunt, J. J., & Malmo, J. (2019). Diseases of cattle in Australasia: a comprehensive textbook. New Zealand Veterinary Association Foundation for Continuing Education. Massey University Press, Auckland, 0745, New Zealand.