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Vaginal Prolapse

Vaginal prolapse is a condition in cattle where varying degrees of vaginal tissue protrude outside of the vulval lips. The prolapsed tissues are vulnerable to trauma and desiccation (exposure).

The condition is common in pregnant cows (usually occurring after the 5th month of gestation).

Predisposing risk factors for vaginal prolapse include.

- Mature females in their third trimester of pregnancy due to increased intra-abdominal pressure with increased size of uterus and intra-abdominal fat. In combination with increase on concentration of oestrogens and relaxin which results in softening of the pelvic girdle and associated soft tissues.
- Distension of the rumen (first stomach) and prolonged time laying down (these both result in an increase in intra-abdominal pressure).
- Repeated superovulation treatment for embryo retrieval programs.
- Some breeds are predisposed to the condition, these include Hereford and Brahman cattle.

Vaginal prolapse's are classified into 4 grades, depending on the severity of the tissue eversion and the degree of tissue damage.

- Grade 1: A small area of the vaginal tissue is everted through the vulval lips intermittently. Minimal trauma and desiccation occur to the exposed tissues.
- Grade 2: Vaginal tissues are everted through the vulval lips continuously.
- Grade 3: The entire vaginal tissue and the cervix protrude through the vulval lips continuously. The urinary bladder often becomes entrapped in the prolapsed tissues. With Grade 3 vaginal eversion, the tissues become traumatized and desiccated, and the cervical plug is lost in therefore increasing the risk of uterine infections +/- placentitis/foetal death.
- Grade 4: This grade is divided into two grades, 4a and 4b. Grade 4a eversion is often referred to as cervical eversion as only the cervix everts through the vulval lips as a mass through the vulva. Whereas Grade 4b eversion is where both the cervical and vaginal tissues are protruding through the vulval lips, and the tissues have become necrotic and fibrotic (chronic condition). The affected animal will be predisposed to infection, bladder entrapment and compromise and possible peritonitis.

Regardless of the grade of vaginal prolapse, the end goal is to replace the everted tissues, in a timely manner, and prevent the tissues from re-everting.

For pregnant animals, a secondary objective is to allow the cow to give birth and rear a calf to weaning age. The cow will need to be closely monitored and when she starts to calve, the suture will need to be removed to allow her to calve normally.

Once a cow has experienced a vaginal prolapse, it is likely it will reoccur in the future. Some producers elect to sell the affected cow once she has reared her calf.