

Central Washington Animal Agriculture Team

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PREVENTING NAVEL ILL

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Using iodine on the navel of any newborn farm animal is an important management practice for the prevention of navel ill. The navel of the newborn is basically a hollow tube which leads directly into the abdominal cavity and liver of the animal. It remains moist for several days after birth, making it easy for bacteria to gain entrance into the body. This is particularly likely, if the animal is born in unsanitary conditions. *Escherichia coli* is a very common bacteria that easily gains access to the body via the wet navel. It can cause a number of serious health problems such as: septicemia (infection of the blood stream) resulting in sudden deaths, abscesses of the liver and kidneys (resulting in a sickly poor performing animal), peritonitis (infection of the abdominal cavity), arthritis caused by abscesses in the joints, and meningitis (infection of the central nervous system).

The symptoms of the disease are not usually observed by most producers until the third week of life when one or more joints of the animal become hot, swollen, full of pus, and painful. However, it can appear as quickly as 3-5 days after birth when the newborn dies suddenly of what

seems to be scours. The actual cause may be *E. coli* that has entered the blood stream via the umbilical cord and caused septicemia and sudden death.

Animals that survive the early stages of navel ill usually become "poor-doers". They do not grow well, and often are depressed and may die later. They usually have internal abscesses caused by *E. coli* in the liver or kidneys, abdomen, or other places in the body.

To prevent navel ill use a strong 7% tincture of iodine on the navel soon after birth. The iodine should be applied by dipping the navel in a jar containing iodine or spraying the navel thoroughly. If you are using an iodine dip to treat a number of newborn animals, change the iodine between every 2 or 3 animals because it becomes deactivated. It is important to use the 7% strength because it does a much better job of drying up the wet umbilicus. Iodine is used for disinfecting, but more importantly, it dries up the navel cord so motile bacteria do not have easy access to the body. Disinfecting helps, but the navel does get re-contaminated as soon as the

newborn lies down again under unsanitary conditions. Dry, clean bedding helps reduce the occurrence of navel ill.

Clipping the navel is often recommended before treatment with iodine if the navel cord is long and drags in the manure and mud. Clipping will also aid the iodine in penetrating the inside of the navel to speed

drying. If you do clip the navel, make sure you wait until the umbilicus no longer pulses and leave 2 inches or more attached to the body. You may cause profuse bleeding if you cut it too soon or too short.

If the navel does not show evidence of drying up within 24 hours, it should be treated again with iodine.