

The importance of hygiene

Hygiene plays a key role in reducing the spread of infection and hence the use of antibiotics, writes **Tommy Heffernan**

Although antibiotics play a vital role on our farms in treating animals with bacterial infections or diseases, misusing and overusing them is a key driver of antibiotic resistance. Therefore, a big part of our One Health story is reducing the need to use antibiotics.

To do this, we must focus on ways of reducing the amount of disease in our animals. When we look at controlling disease on our farms, there are always two elements to consider:

1 Controlling the level of disease-causing agents or pathogens that animals are exposed to, which is called 'infection pressure'.

2 Maximising the immune system of our farm animals to battle these bugs, specifically bacteria.

We can maximise immunity in our animals through good husbandry, optimal nutrition and vaccination. We can also keep animals healthy by reducing the amount of infection they are exposed to, so good on-farm hygiene is vitally important.

Maintaining, and constantly working to improve on-farm hygiene plays a key role in the fight against the development of antibiotic resistance. Good hygiene reduces the level of disease on your farm, and in your animals, so it also reduces the need for treatment as well as the short-term and long-term costs incurred.

Good practice

As we start a new year, here are some examples of good hygiene practices:

- ➔ Proper cleaning of all farm equipment, such as calving jacks, stomach tubes and all equipment used to feed milk to calves, as they can spread disease between animals.
- ➔ A proper milking routine, before and after teat dipping, can reduce the spread of mastitis.
- ➔ Footbathing can prevent or reduce the spread of infectious lameness in sheep and cattle.
- ➔ Cleaning out calving and lambing pens regularly, along with plenty of clean, dry straw can reduce the infection pressure on the next lot of newborn arrivals.
- ➔ Navel dipping calves and lambs at birth can help reduce infections such as navel and joint ill.
- ➔ Disinfectant points entering your farm for all farm visitors. Providing boot covers to visitors entering calf and lamb sheds.
- ➔ Reduce biofilm (the slimy layer in water troughs and feeding equipment where bacteria can hide and grow) through the use of the appropriate detergent and disinfectant at the correct dilution rate, in line with the product instructions.
- ➔ Control of vermin such as mice, rats and birds, which can all spread disease.
- ➔ Wearing gloves when handling animals, especially at calving and lambing time.



Footbathing can prevent or reduce the spread of infectious lameness in sheep and cattle.

\ Philip Doyle



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- ➔ When injecting animals, all needles used should be kept clean and changed regularly.
- ➔ Attention to detail, clean bedding, good drainage and good ventilation all help reduce the levels of bugs in animal housing. Scrape yards and cubicles regularly in the winter.

While good hygiene can help animal health, never forget about yourself and your family. Pathogens that affect animals can also affect humans, such as salmonella, cryptosporidium and leptospirosis. Always practice good hand hygiene when working with animals, especially when heading in home. Leave boots and overalls outside, and wash your hands correctly before entering your own home.

This week in our One Health video, we show how a simple thing like good hand hygiene can save lives.

Good on-farm hygiene reduces the level of bugs and bacteria humans and animals are exposed to. Hygiene should be addressed under your herd health plan. Discuss with your vet and farm adviser what steps you can take in 2020 to improve hygiene levels on your farm. Better hygiene means better health for you, your family and your animals.

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