

**10** Keep weaned calves on good quality grass and continue to feed meals through until sale.

**8** Move cows and calves into good quality grass and commence weaning on a graduated basis.

**6** Administer worm dose 2-3 weeks in advance of weaning.

**4** If implementing a vaccination programme, then administer primary shot of respiratory vaccine plus IBR vaccine. Administer booster shot four weeks later. Vaccination programme should be complete two weeks in advance of weaning.

**2** Administer primary shot of clostridial vaccine followed by booster shot four weeks later.

### KEYPOINTS

- Carry out a health check on any weanlings you suspect to be showing early signs of suffering from a respiratory condition.
- Treat sick calves immediately.
- Only wean calves when the weather is dry and fine.
- Avoid sudden changes to the diet immediately post-weaning. Where possible try and keep calves on the same diet post weaning as fed pre-weaning.
- Do not sell calves for at least 14 days after weaning.

calves should be monitored at least three times per day. Feeding meals is a good way of determining the health status of calves. Watch out for any calves slow to come to the trough or lying away from the main group. Where calves are being fed meals ad lib, then you need to spend time going through stock making sure there are no health problems. Key signs to look for are calves that:

- Look empty and are collapsed in around the stomach;
- Have their eyes sunk back in their head;
- Are breathing heavy;

- Have their neck extended out in front of them and have their heads down;
- Are drooling around the mouth.

Early detection and treatment of respiratory conditions is critical to ensuring animals make a full and speedy recovery. Adopting a policy of delaying action and hoping for a miracle cure is playing with fire. Vets often comment on how some farmers have noticed calves sick yet have failed to take action until the following day.

Calves should be kept close to the yard or near handling facilities so that, if necessary, they can be handled in a stress free manner. Trying to remove one sick calf from the group can often result in placing it under severe stress. Therefore, it is often better to bring the entire group of calves to the yard and then remove the sick animal. When in the yard you should carry out a quick health check as outlined in **Figure 2**.

This will help you determine whether or not a calf is showing the early signs of a respiratory problem. If a calf fails this health check, then you should consult with your vet as to the best course of treatment.

## Top tips: Keeping your weanling healthy after purchase

THE introduction of the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme will help alleviate many of the health problems associated with buying weanlings. However, it is still important that the necessary steps are taken to ensure that weanlings remain healthy after purchase:

**Inspect stock before they enter the ring:** It is important that when you arrive at the mart you don't simply head straight for the sale ring. At best you will only get 30-60 seconds to look at the calf. Often you can miss some of the telltale signs that indicate trouble. You should

go down to the yard and look at the selection of stock on offer. Pick out the weanlings that best suit the system you are operating and record their lot numbers. Avoid selecting weanlings that are showing signs of not having been weaned properly. You should continue to feed 1kg of meal for at least two weeks after purchase. Not only will the meal help them to settle but it is also an ideal way of identifying sick animals. Where grass supplies are running tight, you should increase meal feeding levels to 2kg per day until housing.

**Check stock regularly:** Early intervention is the key to treating sick weanlings. It is essential that you check stock at least three times per day for the first weeks after purchase and twice daily

thereafter. Always check weanlings first thing in the morning as cold wet nights can trigger a pneumonia outbreak. When you suspect an animal is sick, the first thing to do is complete the health check outlined in Figure 2.

**Dosing programme:** If you are unsure of the dosing history of a weanling and suspect it to have a heavy worm burden, do not move in with an Avermectin-based drench right away. Treating an animal with a heavy worm burden using an Avermectin based wormer can actually cause a pneumonia outbreak. Wait for at least three-to-four days after purchase and then treat with either a white drench or a Levamisole-based product. These products have a reduced worm kill and are not as severe on the animal.

As they provide no residual cover, you should administer a second Avermectin based dose within seven to 10 days. Where you do not suspect a worm problem, dosing should be left until three weeks prior to housing. You should then treat animals with an Avermectin-based product that will provide protection for four to six weeks depending on the product. This will ensure that calves' lungs are in a healthy condition prior to being housed.

**Do not castrate after purchase:** You should avoid castrating bull weanlings for at least two weeks after purchase. The added stress can lead to health problems. Remember under EU regulations calves over six months of age must be castrated by a veterinary surgeon.

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Intervet Schering-Plough Animal Health Ltd, Boghall Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

Tel: +353 (0)1 205 0900.

 **Intervet**  
Schering-Plough Animal Health