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What Vermont Farmers Should Know About Frostbite

Dr. Elizabeth Martens

Frostbite happens when extremities become wet and then are exposed to severe cold. Mild frostbite causes numbness followed by pain and hair loss, while more severe frostbite leads to sloughing of tissue. Healthy animals can usually withstand cold down to ~0°F, though sick or fresh cows with poor blood flow and newborn calves are at risk before that point.



Cows should be getting teats dipped with a special winter formulation dip – these are focused more on skin moisturization but still have some germicidal activity. Dry teat dip powders or completely skipping the post-dip step are also options on the coldest days of winter.

Calves get frostbite on the ears and around the muzzle. Make sure newborns are completely dry before moving out to a cold pen or hutch and provide jackets and deep, dry bedding for nesting.

Treatment of frostbite involves bringing the animal inside to warm up as fast as possible. Rapid warming is more painful but results in less tissue damage long term. You could thaw frostbitten tissue with water up to 110°F. Lanolin or aloe ointments are recommended afterward as well as daily checks for infected tissue as sloughing occurs. Tissue that has been frostbitten once is more susceptible to the problem again.

Green Mountain Dairy Discussion Group

Tuesday, February 3rd: Lee Erickson with Zinpro will discuss the latest in hoof trimming and lameness

Friday, March 20th: Dr. Ryan Breuer from the University of Wisconsin will discuss immediate neonatal calf care and give tips for resuscitation of calves that don't thrive right away

Vermont Dairy Producers Conference

February 17th, 2026

DoubleTree by Hilton, South Burlington

Valleywide's On Call Service

We are here for your veterinary emergencies 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

When you call the office number before 8AM or after 4PM, your call will be forwarded to the veterinarian on call. ***Expect to leave a voice message on their cell and hear back from a vet within 15-20 minutes***, usually much sooner.

Emergency calls are charged an additional fee that varies depending on the time you call. Middle of the night calls are charged more than evening or weekend day calls. Emergencies during the workday are also charged a lower, daytime emergency fee. Please don't try to "save" an emergency fee by waiting until 8AM the next weekday for an animal that truly needs to be seen sooner. At 8AM, all of the vets are often heading to a scheduled call, so that can be the time of day that takes the longest and is the most disruptive to other farmers for a vet to attend an emergency. Outcomes for calvings, prolapses, bleeding cows and broken bones are MUCH better the sooner we can get there.

If you have an animal that you would like to be seen that day, we appreciate you calling the office as early after 8AM as you can. It helps us arrange our schedules and plan calls efficiently. Any same day calls made after 12PM may be charged either a late call or emergency fee depending on if we can get a veterinarian out there and get the job done within the rest of the planned work day.

Cost of Providing Employee Housing – Research Participation Opportunity!

Cornell Ag Workforce Development is working on a project to understand costs to dairy farms of providing employee housing. The information is compiled and presented back to participating farms in terms of benchmarking what the farm is spending compared to other farms and showing the most economical types of housing (dormitory style vs mobile homes vs single family homes). The calculator figures out the cost per hour worked for employees. Based on the group's work so far, this number is surprising for some farms.

If we can get together a group of at least 5 farms in Vermont, they may be able to include us in the research project and run the numbers to present back to our group for benchmarking and discussion. Participation would consist of filling out a survey for each housing unit the farm has, perhaps a one on one Zoom meeting with the researcher to go over your survey, and then a group meeting to see compiled results. If you are interested, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Martens.

Save the Date: Valleywide's Producer Dinner Thursday, March 19th

Middlebury VFW post 7823

5:30 open bar

6PM buffet style dinner

6:30PM: Dr. Ryan Breuer from University of Wisconsin sharing stories and case studies from his experience in and around calving

