

## Is Your Calf Bedding Deep Enough?

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Winter will soon be upon us with cold days and snow. Calves are born with little body fat which is essential for immune function (fighting off disease) as well as maintaining body heat during the cold season. Calves are vulnerable to cold stress in the winter. When cold stressed, calves will use their fat reserves and nutrients they consume from milk and calf starter to maintain body heat instead of using the nutrients for growth. Newborn calves are cold-stressed at 500F while a one-month old calf is cold stressed at 320F.

Bedding provides a potential effective way for calves to reduce heat loss on those cold days. If the bedding is sufficiently deep, the calf can “nest” and trap a boundary layer of warm air (insulation of heat) around itself. Not only will “nesting” keep the calf warm, but research at UW-School of Veterinary Medicine found as the “nesting score” increased, the prevalence of respiratory disease in calf barns is reduced. This may be due to the fact the calf is able to

maintain it’s immune system to fight off disease instead of using its fat reserves to maintain body heat.

How deep is deep? **Calves should have a nesting score of 3 during the winter months** (November through April) to help maintain body heat and to reduce the prevalence of respiratory disease. To see if your calves have enough bedding, compare the bedding in the calf pens to these pictures:

**Nesting score = 1**

*Legs entirely visible when lying down*



**Nesting score = 2**

*Legs partially visible when lying down*



**Nesting score = 3**

*Legs generally not visible when lying down*



*Pictures courtesy of Dr. Ken Nordlund, UW-School of Veterinary Medicine*