

Why do I need to take the fresh cow's temperature for 10 days after calving? Isn't three or four days long enough?

If you take temperatures for only a few days after calving, you may miss cows that develop fevers later. In a field trial conducted in Idaho, most cows displayed fevers within three to five days after calving, but a significant number developed fevers from six to 10 days postpartum. If cows are not monitored for a full 10 days, delayed treatment may be less successful. By the time other symptoms of illness appear, the disease has often taken hold and calls for use of higher levels of specialized antibiotics to treat infection. The treatment may be prolonged and expensive. These are reasons why a 10-day temperature monitoring period is critical.

Why should I temp cows, if they look fine?

Recent research shows a very low correlation between early, obvious fresh-cow problems, such as dystocia and retained placentas, and fevers in the 10-day window. In other words, cows that calved normally and appear healthy are still susceptible to contracting metritis and developing fevers in the first 10 days postpartum. An Idaho field trial reported that 20 percent of cows that calved normally still came down with fevers in the first 10 days postpartum. This information tells us that visual observation alone is not reliable enough to determine a cow's health status.

I have a freestall operation with no lock-ups, and it is not convenient to take temperatures. Do you have suggestions on how I can implement this part of the program?

A digital thermometer reads a cow's temperature in seconds, allowing you to monitor fresh cows without the use of lock-ups. Cows can be approached while lying down in the freestalls or while eating at the feed bunk. Depending on the milking parlor design, temperature readings can be taken while cows are waiting in the holding area or during milking. If the parlor is equipped with catch pens or palpation rails, cows can be redirected to these pens after milking and temperatures can be taken there. Discuss additional strategies with your veterinarian and/or local Pfizer Animal Health representative.

Where can I get a digital thermometer?

Your veterinarian can supply this type of thermometer. In addition, a complete range of digital thermometers is available from [GLA Agricultural Electronics](#), a company that specializes in thermometers and accessories for the animal health industry.

What are the symptoms of metritis?

Fever is one of the first signs of acute postpartum metritis, and often surfaces 24 to 36 hours before other symptoms. Watch for reduced appetite, low production and general depression. It is normal for cows to have some uterine discharge for about two weeks after calving. But if the discharge is accompanied by fever and foul odor, metritis almost always is the culprit.

What causes metritis?

During the first week postpartum, bacterial contamination occurs in up to 90 percent of cows. Cows are less prepared to ward off [metritis](#) when they encounter twins, difficult calving or improper calving assistance. Excessive stretching of the uterus and inadequate nutrition interfere with uterine involution.

Rapid involution is key to naturally expelling fluid, placental membranes and bacteria from the reproductive tract. Whether or not full-blown metritis will develop depends on three factors:

- The number and virulence of the bacteria present
 - The condition of the uterus
 - The strength of the cow's natural defense mechanisms
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- **When is the best time to administer a uterine contractor?**
 - As recommended in the fresh-cow protocol, use a uterine contractor on day one, the day of calving, on all cows diagnosed with abnormal calvings and those that display fevers.