

# Disinfecting the Navel: Get Off to a Good Start

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The usual recommendations are still valid when it comes to navel disinfection in young calves.



1. Where should you disinfect? In clean calving facilities because disinfectants are more effective when the navel is clean!
2. When? As quickly as possible, during the first hour after birth as soon as the calf is breathing well.
3. How? Apply a disinfectant solution to all areas of the navel that are

moist.

Disinfectant solution can be applied in several different ways. The preferred methods of application are a cup, a sponge, or a compress, and in all cases the solution must be clean (changed with every use). Aerosol sprays are not recommended as the product can be irritating when applied to the skin.

One simple and effective trick is to use a [paper cup](#) (the type that is often found at a water dispenser). Add about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a cup of the chosen solution, insert the navel into the cup, move the cup around to cover the navel well, then throw the paper cup and remaining solution away.

4. Which product should I use? 16% iodine, an iodine tincture, Iospray, or teat dip... which one is best? Products that have a drug identification number (DIN) and are approved for external use on wounds are good choices. Several studies have tried to verify which product was the best for use on navels, but none have been able to demonstrate one product was superior to the others, be it iodine-based products, alcohol, a mix of both, chlorhexidine, or teat dip.

The top choices, in order, are: 1) 7% Iodine Tincture, 2) Alcohol-iodine mix, 3) 2% Chlorhexidine, 4) 16% Strong Iodine, diluted 5) Teat Dip

5. When? Generally, the navel should be treated once soon after birth and then a second time 12-24 hours later. The bigger the navel, the longer it should be treated. It is recommended to monitor the navel during the first 7 to 10 days of life.
6. Who? Ideally the same person that cares for the calves daily.

Protect your eyes and mucous membranes during treatment. Wear gloves

as a good practice to protect hands from becoming dry over time.

7. Why? The navel, being the connection between the cow and the calf during gestation, is a prime entry point for bacteria to get into the bloodstream. Research tells us that disinfecting the navel of newborn calves reduces the mortality rate by half in herds that adopt this practice (Jorgensen, 2017). According to the last available data (Renaud, 2017), 40% of producers in Canada treat the navels of male calves at birth.



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There are no products registered for use on newborn calf navels in Canada, therefore use products meant for the treatment of wounds. When using off-label products such as teat dip on the navel, the producer must have written veterinary instructions (section 8).