

Is your teat dip effective?

Often at this time of year somatic cell counts (SCC) can rise on dairy farms. Post milking teat disinfecting is one of the most important jobs in the milking process. It is also the job that is consistently done incorrectly. Carrying out post milking teat disinfection correctly will give a 50% reduction in new infections.

#### Technique

Many people think that if there is a drop of teat dip at the end of the teat then the job is done well enough. However this is not the case as the whole surface of the teat needs to be covered with the disinfectant. All of the teat comes in contact with the liner when milking and all of the teat is capable of harbouring bacteria. Also cows do not have hair or sweat glands on their teats so in order to keep them soft and supple a teat disinfectant with an emollient should be used on the whole teat. You should spray upwards from beneath the teat and not from the side. Do not spray cows as they walk past you exiting the parlour. Usually in a herringbone parlour you get good coverage if you spray the cows in front of their legs and then spray behind the leg. In side by side parlour a circular motion clockwise followed by another anti-clockwise normally sprays cows well. You can check your technique by wrapping a piece of paper towel around the teat after it has been sprayed and you should see a nice solid pattern. Make sure you use 15 ml per cow per milking in post milk teat disinfection. So a 100 cow herd should be using 1.5 litres of teat dip every milking. This may appear wasteful but these products don't cost a lot and the teat dip won't do any good in the drum or barrel. We often find about half the recommended rate is used by farmers.

#### Product choice

Use a ready to use (RTU) product. Products which require mixing with water should be avoided as water quality tends to be poor on farms and the product has almost got to disinfect the water ever before it ends up on the cows' teats. It's also a job less to do and RTU products can be very cheap now also. The most common types of teat dips now have lactic acid or chlorhexidine as their active ingredients but others can also be as effective. Iodine will be very effective at killing mastitis causing organisms but it tends to hard on cows teats and there may be a residue issue. Teat dips should also contain 8-10% emollients such as glycerine or lanolin and fly repellents are also useful to have in the product during the summer months. Many products can be used both pre and post and many will also foam up too which is useful pre milking especially when milking cows are housed on cubicles in the spring or autumn. Getting your technique correct is more important than selecting the "best teat dip" as most of the products out there are very effective.

#### Shop around

Make sure you shop around before you buy teat dip. There are many competitors on the market now selling teat dip and they're all looking for business. Many will do deals and special offers at certain times of year. You should buy in bulk as most products are good for 2 years and often the more you buy the cheaper the product, so buy it cheaper and use more of it. Make sure your product is an approved biocide and has a PCS number.