

Calf Disbudding Shed Guide

Delivering
for Dairy

Key points

Calves must be less than two months of age and provided with pain relief.

- Ideal age is 4–6 weeks.
- Disbud small groups more regularly rather than large groups with a wide age range.

Disbudding must be carried out by a skilled operator or someone under their direct supervision.

Ensure calves are appropriately restrained or sedated.

Disbudding tips must be large enough to cover the entire circumference of the horn bud (18–22mm depending on calf size).

Successful hot iron cautery will result in a copper-coloured ring around the entire circumference of the horn bud.

Step 1

Selecting calves

- Disbud calves prior to two months of age (4–6 weeks of age being the ideal).
- Ensure calves are healthy and robust, and out of the risk period for calf scours or other diseases on farm.

Step 2

Required equipment and maintenance

- Ensure all required equipment is well maintained and in working order before commencement.



Refer to the Dairy Australia Disbudding Equipment List for further information.

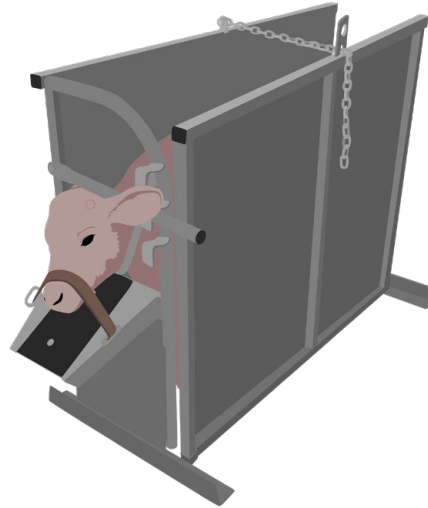
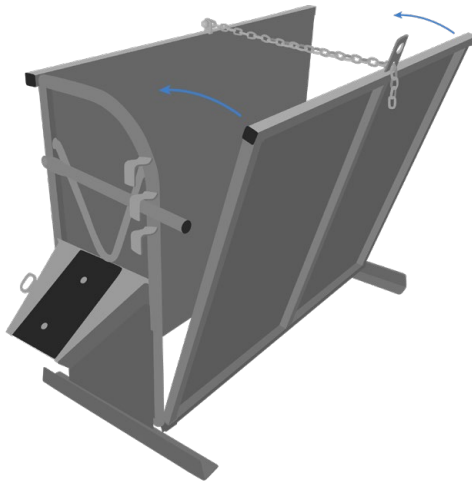


Step 3

Calf restraint

- Ensure the calf is appropriately restrained to minimise injury to the operator or calf.
- Restrain using one of the following:

Custom calf crush



Disbudding head restraint

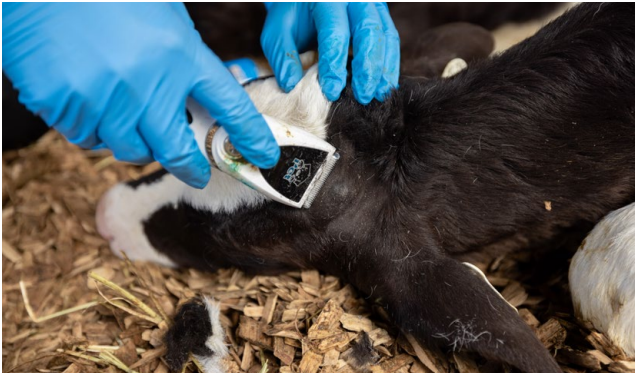


Sedation – if utilising a veterinary service



Step 4

Preparing the disbudding site



Clip the area of the horn bud with pet grooming shears. This helps to:

- Identify if the animal is polled.
- Prevent excessive smoke when disbudding.
- Improve ease and accuracy when disbudding.



Check to see if the calf is polled. A distinctive bump should protrude from the skin, this is less obvious in younger calves. If the calf is polled, the skin will wrinkle over the head when pinched.



Apply pre-operative pain relief and local anaesthetic if part of your disbudding protocol.



If horn buds are large, use secateurs to snip off the tip to improve contact of the hot iron while disbudding.

Step 5

Cauterisation



Place the burner on the bud at right angles to the head, covering its entire circumference. Rotate the burner whilst applying pressure for 5–6 seconds to cauterise the site. While scooping the bud is not required, it can be a helpful technique to ensure you have adequately cauterised the site and where fly populations are an issue, it may minimise instances of flystrike.



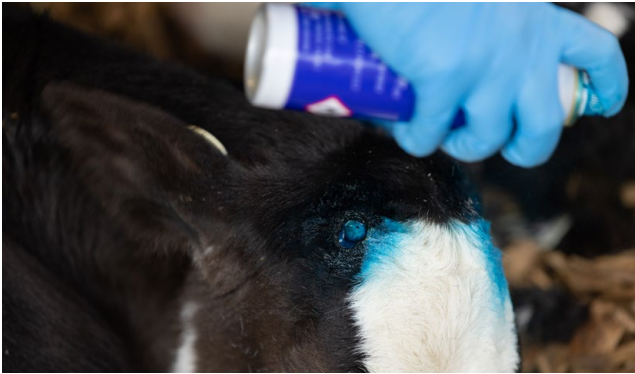
Successful hot iron cautery must result in a copper-coloured ring around the entire circumference of the site.



Ensure the burner tip is allowed to return to operating temperatures between calves, particularly in cooler or windy weather.

Step 6

Post cautery care



Apply Tri-solfen or a topical antiseptic spray to the site



If calves have been sedated, ensure they are sitting in sternal recumbency.



In peak fly periods apply appropriate fly control such as Extinosad aerosol, Cetrigen Wound Spray or Chloromide Antiseptic Spray.

Step 7

Other husbandry practices

- Disbudding provides an opportune time to complete other husbandry procedures such as ear tagging, genomic testing, vaccination and castration.

Pain relief options

*Refer to the Dairy Australia Using Pain Relief on Dairy Farms fact sheet.



Environmental considerations

Environment

- Ideally disbud calves while they are housed undercover. If calves are outside, avoid disbudding prior to wet weather
- Avoid very hot or very cold days (particularly for sedated calves). If disbudding on such days is unavoidable, ensure calves are monitored closely afterwards.

Biosecurity

Ensure appropriate biosecurity measures are in place to minimise spread between pens and farms.

- Provide access to water, soap and disinfectant.
- Wear clean clothing and disposable gloves.
- Clean and disinfect boots.
- For external contractors:
 - ensure they arrive with clean equipment
 - clean and disinfect their equipment before they leave.



Disbudding training video

Scan the QR code for a step-by-step video of the calf disbudding process.





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