Q: When should I start drenching my calves?
A: Calves don’t need to be drenched until they’re likely to have a worm burden. That isn’t likely to happen until pasture has been their main feed source for at least three weeks. Until then, you’re likely to be wasting your drench on calves with no worms!

Oral drenching is the best way to kill worms in cattle. That’s why we recommend drenching calves orally to optimise growth rates. Trials have shown the absorption of pour-on drenches across the skin can be affected by temperature, licking, moisture, dirt in the coat, rain and application technique – and all these factors can undermine the effectiveness of the drench.

Q: Why should I choose an oral drench instead of a pour-on?
A: Pour-on drenches are often used for cattle because they’re easy to administer. But the way the drench is delivered can have a significant effect on how well it works.

We recommend using orals for as long as you can do so safely. A recently published New Zealand trial found that the efficacy of moxidectin was significantly lower against Cooperia worms when the active was administered by pour-on or injection, compared with oral dosing.

Q: Is it safe to drench while calves are suckling from the milk-feeder?
A: No!

The practice of drenching calves as they suckle from a calfeteria or milk feeder (i.e. pulling them off the teat one at a time and drenching orally) is common but not advisable. With the ML/mectin drenches in particular, this puts calves at risk of toxicity. These drenches are designed to be delivered into the rumen where they can be absorbed slowly.

Rumen bypass occurs where a suckling calf drinks milk, and the suckling stimulates a valve-like mechanism in the gut to take milk straight to the true stomach (abomasum). If calves are drenched while they’re suckling, drench is likely to be delivered straight into the true stomach as well, where it will be absorbed faster than intended. Rapid absorption of drench is one of the risk factors for toxicity.

If a calf’s diet does not consist of enough grass/meal, the rumen may not be developed. The thin wall of an immature rumen will absorb drench faster than intended.

As well as the risks associated with rapid absorption, if you drench calves while they’re suckling from milk-feeders you risk dosing some twice and missing others out completely. This could result in overdosing some calves and leaving others undrenched.

Q: Is it safe to drench while calves are suckling from the milk-feeder?
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