

# Calving Preparation Checklist

Two-week prep, dystocia decision tree, calf revival, post-calving cow checks. Print and pin to the calving-shed door.

## Two weeks before due date

- Move cow to calving paddock - flat, sheltered, close to the yards, with line-of-sight from the house. Remove from main mob 14 days out.
- Confirm she is on a rising plane of nutrition - last-trimester energy demand doubles. Lush green pasture or quality hay + a small grain ration if pasture is poor.
- Inspect udder weekly. Heat or hardness = mastitis warning before calving.
- Body condition score check. Aim for BCS 3.0 - 3.5 at calving. Too fat = dystocia risk. Too lean = milk and rebreeding problems.
- Calving kit ready in the ute or shed: lubricant, OB sleeves, calving chains + handles, iodine for navel, towel, head torch, mobile phone with vet's number.
- Heifers in their own paddock, separate from cows. They calve harder and need more watching.

## Signs calving is close

**2-7 days out:** Udder fills and tightens. Vulva swells and softens. Tail-head ligaments relax.

**24-48 hours out:** Restless, separates from the mob, walks fence-lines. Mucous discharge (clear or slightly bloody).

**2-6 hours out:** Lies down, gets up, lies down again. Tail held to one side. Visible contractions.

**Imminent (within an hour):** Water bag appears at the vulva. Hard straining begins.

## Normal labour timeline

**Stage 1 (preparation):** 2-6 hours. Cow restless, mild contractions, cervix dilating. No visible calf yet.

**Stage 2 (delivery):** Heifer: up to 4 hours. Cow: up to 2 hours from water-bag-appearing.  
Normal presentation = two front feet first, soles pointing down, head following between the legs.

**Stage 3 (cleaning):** Placenta passed within 6-12 hours. Retained placenta > 24 hours = call the vet.

## When to assist vs when to call the vet

Situation	Action
Water bag visible > 2 hours, no calf, no straining	Examine internally. If presentation feels normal but contractions are weak, light traction with chains. If anything feels wrong, call vet.
Heifer pushed > 1 hour with no progress	Examine. Common: head turned back, leg back, breech.
Cow pushed > 30 min with no progress	Examine immediately.
Only one foot visible, or feet with no head	Leg back or head back. Push calf back in, reposition. If you can't, call vet now.
Tail or hocks visible, no feet	Breech or upside-down. Call vet now - this needs experience.
You've been pulling for 20 minutes with chains and no progress	STOP. Call vet. Continuing risks tearing the cow or killing the calf.
Bleeding from the vulva, calf not visible	Internal tear or twisted uterus. Call vet now.

## Calf revival - first 5 minutes

1. Clear mucous from mouth and nostrils. Use a clean finger to sweep the throat if blocked.
2. Stimulate breathing - rub vigorously with a towel along the chest. Tickle the inside of the nostril with a piece of straw or grass.
3. If no breath in 60 seconds: hold calf upside down by hind legs for 10-15 seconds to drain fluid. Don't swing in circles - this is now considered harmful.
4. Place calf in sternal position (sitting on its brisket, head up). NOT on its side - lungs collapse.
5. Dip the navel cord in iodine solution (7%). Reduces joint-ill risk dramatically.
6. Ensure calf gets colostrum within 6 hours - 4 litres for a beef calf, 4-6 litres for a dairy calf. After 24 hours the gut stops absorbing antibodies.

## Cow checks - first 24 hours

- Cow stands and starts cleaning the calf within 5 minutes. If she ignores the calf, monitor closely.
- Calf nurses within 2 hours (or you tube-feed colostrum).
- Placenta passes within 6-12 hours.
- Cow drinks and starts grazing within a few hours.
- Day 1-3: watch for milk fever (down cow, cold ears, weak), mastitis, metritis (stinking discharge), retained placenta beyond 24h.

**Emergency vet numbers (write yours here):** \_\_\_\_\_