METRITIS is a devastating disease that can cause a cascade of serious problems for any dairy operation. As the disease can cause losses on average of $358 to $386 per cow with a case of metritis, knowing and identifying its common predisposing risk factors significantly impacts transition cow management decisions. Furthermore, early detection and proper treatment are key to preventing costly consequences that directly affect your bottom line.
Direct losses associated with metritis include:

» Increased treatment costs
» Decreased milk production and discarded milk
» Increased culling
» Possible death risk

Indirect losses are experienced through:

» Reduced reproductive efficiency with prolonged days open
» Other fresh cow diseases like ketosis, displaced abomasums or mastitis
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Proper transition and fresh cow management focuses on maximizing pre- and postpartum health to ensure peak performance in early lactation.

Help reduce risks for fresh cow disorders during the transition period by following this management timeline.

Monitor high-risk cows with proper identification of common risk factors that lead to metritis. Early detection of these risk factors ensures timely treatment is administered to help avoid costly effects in the future.

Ideally, producers should aim for a goal of metritis cases less than 10 percent of the herd. To help reach that goal, monitor these factors in at-risk postpartum cows:

- Retained Fetal Membrane
  Failure to expel the fetal membranes within 12 to 24 hours after calving is defined as a retained fetal membrane. Cows that experience a retained fetal membrane are six times more likely to develop metritis.

- Dystocia
  Defined as a difficult delivery due to an abnormality in the shape, size or position of the unborn calf and an extended calving period more than eight hours. Dystocia increases the likelihood of a cow developing metritis by 2.1 times more when compared with a normal calving. Difficult calving is the leading cause of calf mortality. The resulting costs are longer calving intervals and increased labor and veterinary care.

- Stillbirth
  A calf that is not born alive or that is lost within the first 48 hours of birth increases the chances that a cow experiences a retained placenta by 2.6 times. A stillborn calf also raises the likelihood that the dam will develop metritis by 1.5 times more.

- Twinning
  A cow that produces twins at calving is 3.4 times more likely to experience a retained placenta and 10.5 times more likely to experience dystocia — creating an indirect link to metritis.

- Decreased Dry Matter Intake
  Any interference with normal dry matter intake during the transition phase can affect immune function, start-up milk in the fresh period and postpartum feed intake, and creates a risk for ketosis.

Know and identify the common metritis risk factors:

- Close-Up Period
  - Avoid moving close-up cows into new pens during the last 10 days prior to calving.
  - Monitor all animals for uniform feed intake.
  - Eliminate moldy or heated feeds that cause appetite depression by cleaning out feed bunks daily.
  - Avoid overcrowding all transition pens by stocking at less than 100 percent and providing adequate feed bunk space (approximately 30 inches).
  - Avoid unnecessary pen moves during any transition stage. If required, move animals once weekly and in groups of 10 to minimize stressors.
  - Separate heifers and older cows to evade hostile and aggressive behavior toward heifers.
  - Determine body condition score of cows about to enter the maternity pen (3.0 to 3.75 is normal).
  - Focus on heat stress abatement strategies in hotter months, including providing adequate shade for each cow.

- Maternity Pen
  - Strive to move only those cows that are about to calve to maternity pens; transitioning cows during early stage one labor may result in an increased risk of stillbirth, ultimately increasing the likelihood for metritis to develop.
  - Devote an employee to walking the close-up and maternity pens every hour, monitoring for cows that are displaying signs of active labor and checking progress on those that are calving.
  - Maintain clean and dry facilities. Mud and heat stress lead to decreased appetite, while wet conditions increase the risk of mastitis. The maternity pen can pose risks, like metritis, if cows are calving in damp conditions.

- Fresh Cow Monitoring and Treatment
  Reduce hospital pen moves by implementing a typical 10-day monitoring program that helps detect signs of fresh cow illnesses to ensure timely treatment. When monitoring fresh cows for signs of illness, evaluate:
  - Overall attitude for heavy breathing, little or no appetite and depression
  - Uterine discharge for color and odor
  - Heart, rumen and lung sounds for abnormalities
  - Ears in comparison to her neighbor’s
  - Presence of nasal discharge
  - Manure quality
  - Temperature for fever over 103°F (39.4°C). Be sure to evaluate the entire cow as some cases of fresh cow disorders do not include fever.

You Transition Cow Management Checklist
Transition and fresh cow risk management makes a difference

At Zoetis, we understand the importance of managing and preventing risks, like metritis, to ensure your business remains steadfast and productive. That’s why we dedicate time and energy to programs and support that help you realize all aspects of dairy wellness, including healthy and productive fresh cows.

Partner with your veterinarian to implement a sound transition and fresh cow management program, or ask how to refine an existing program to guard against risks like metritis — because risk management makes a difference to the productivity of your herd.