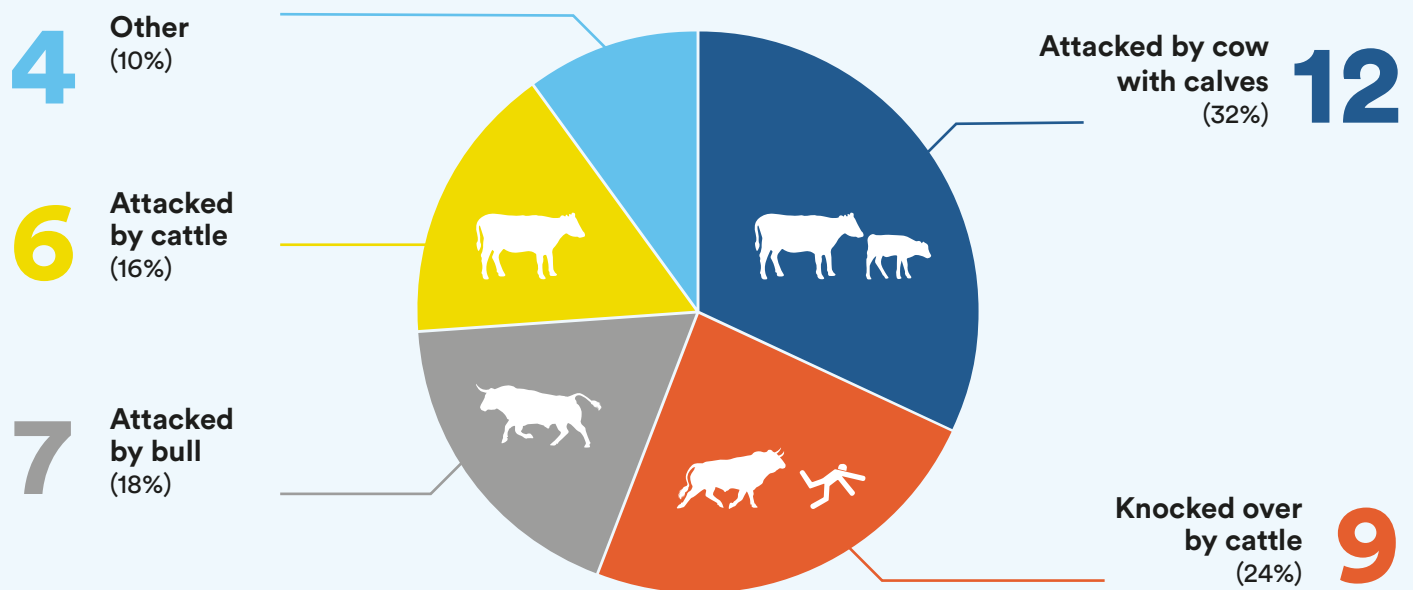


Farm Safety during Calving

Don't let what should be a happy event for both farmer and cow (heifer) turn into a fatal incident. A cow/heifer attack can have very serious consequences and you must take adequate precautions to protect yourself from such incidents well before calving commences on your farm. Almost one third (32%) of farm fatalities involving livestock are from cows with calves and over 50% of non-fatal farm injuries are now associated with livestock handling.



Source HSA 2022

Attacks by freshly calved cows/heifers are the most common cause of deaths with livestock. Before entering any calving pen always identify your best escape route in case of an attack.

- Always keep a strong gate between you and the freshly calved cow/heifer, particularly when handling, treating or removing the calf. Never turn your back on the cow/heifer when handling the new-born calf as the cow/heifer can attack and cause very serious or fatal injuries.
- Always carry a stick when entering a pen to aid control of cows/heifers and be aware of the risk of a non-aggressive animal causing a crush incident.
- Carry a fully charged mobile with you at all times to use in case of emergency but have the ring tone turned to low so as to not alarm livestock.

Farm Safety during Calving

Calving Pens

Calving can be an anxious time. Good calving facilities, adequate calving pens, calving gates, good underfoot non-slip conditions and fresh bedding are all essential requirements. It is important to have well designed calving pens and that they are located adjacent to cow housing facilities. It must be possible to access and exit these pens easily either directly or by using gated or walled passageways. Calving gates should be positioned to the front of the pen.

Department of Agriculture specifications for calving pens state:

Calving pens may be divided by barriers or gates. It is recommended that at least one calving pen should be provided for every 15-20 cows. Every calving pen shall have access to a calving gate within the pen. It is strongly recommended that a separate calving gate be installed in every calving pen, however, there shall be at least one calving gate between every two calving pens. In cases where a calving gate is shared between pens, a system shall be provided to restrain the cow and calf in the other pen while the calving gate is in use. The calving gate shall be in accordance with Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Specification S.138. <https://assets.gov.ie/95209/71aec7f3-eed5-4ff6-aeef-53771b0b827f.pdf>

Group Calving pens

Where group calving pens are used it is important that cows are kept in manageable group sizes. Each group pen should have an individual calving pen located adjacent to it. Group pens should also include safe zones (areas with protected barriers from livestock) within the pen so that there are places of refuge available if signs of aggression are observed or in case of attack. Ring feeders or round bales placed within the pen with straw or hay may also help to subdivide the pen and provide a refuge.

Equipment

While timing is important in these situations having the right equipment to hand (calving jack, ropes, etc.) and planning ahead can lower risk of dangerous incident and stress during the calving season.

Always make use of calving facilities

It is important to take the time to move cows into calving pens before assisting them. Having calving facilities on the farm and not using them because of the time and effort involved in moving cows into the pen must be avoided. This is time well spent as the animals will be less stressed when they are properly confined and the task will be easier, safer and better managed.

Tagging calves safely

Tagging or treating the calf can be particularly dangerous as the calf will generally cry out which can result in a cow attack. It is best to tag or treat a calf in a controlled environment such as a shed with good gating facilities. Always maintain a good physical barrier i.e. a strong gate between you and the cow to provide protection if the cow does attack. Or restrain the cow in a headlock so that she cannot attack.

Remember a cow will remain protective for a considerable period of time so always think how you will protect yourself in the event of an attack.

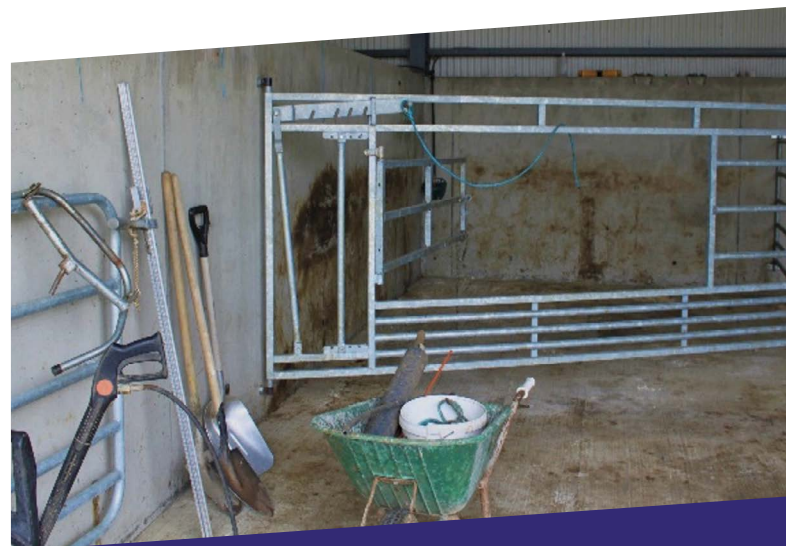


Never Tag a calf while the cow is unrestrained in a pen

Calving cameras

Calving cameras can be a useful aid to reduce the risks around calving so you can monitor from a distance as well as easing the workload and fatigue involved in 24 hours pre-calving supervision. Cameras can also help to avoid disturbing the natural calving activity, particularly for heifers. Evening or night-time feeding may reduce, although not eliminate, the number of night calving's.

For calving indoors, good lighting is essential for safety and efficiency in dealing with the birth. A minimum lighting level of 100 lux is recommended.



Farm Safety during Calving

Farmer Health

Fatigue can become a significant safety factor as it will impair good judgement, particularly if intervention is necessary at calving time. So be prepared, get good rest beforehand particularly in the weeks running up to calving. Monitor your fatigue levels, eat well and drink plenty of water to keep hydrated and alert. If the calving period is particularly difficult consider bringing in some extra help which will cost far less than having a serious injury.

Also, be aware of zoonotic infections which can be contracted by farmers and their vets during calving. Always wear arm length gloves and washable protective clothing and boots. Have adequate washing facilities available to minimise the potential of infectious disease.

Seek help

Despite your best efforts, you may run into difficulties with the birth (e.g. an oversized calf, a calf coming backwards, a dead or deformed calf, intertwined twins, twisted womb, smelly or bloody discharge). If in doubt, seek help or contact your vet for advice.

See link below for video clip '*Safe Handling at Calving.*'
<http://vimeo.com/29718558>

Further information on Farm Safety risks and precautions is available in the [*Code of Practice for Preventing Injury and Occupational Ill health in Agriculture published by the Health and Safety Authority.*](#)

Other useful information relating to this area has been published by the Health and Safety Executive UK entitled [*HSE Information Sheet 2- Common Zoonoses in Agriculture.*](#)

[*S147 Minimum Specification for Calving Pens, Separation Pens, and Isolation Boxes.*](#)



Farm Safety during Calving



STAY SAFE

Create a good Physical Barrier when Tagging



An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority

For further information:
Visit www.hsa.ie/farmsafety

BeSMART.ie



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