

Does touching teats spread mastitis?

Is it true that touching cows' teats during milking can spread the bacteria that leads to mastitis? DairyNZ senior scientist Jane Lacy-Hulbert 'hands' you the answer.



Bacteria live on skin, so there's always a risk that teats will become contaminated by mastitis bacteria during the milking process. Bacteria can be spread during milking by contact with milk from an infected udder. The risks can be minimised by ensuring good teat condition and effective teat-spraying practices.

Detection

Foremilk stripping is the most effective way to detect clinical mastitis, which shows as abnormalities in the milk. Stripping a few squirts of milk onto a black paddle, rather than the ground, makes these changes more visible.

Farms that routinely foremilk strip tend to have better control of their bulk milk somatic cell count (SCC). Foremilk stripping offers other advantages to make milking easier on-farm:

• Teat condition monitoring

Maintaining healthy teat skin is important for successful prevention of mastitis. Bacteria grow and multiply in rough teat skin and teat sores. Foremilk stripping provides an ideal opportunity to check teat condition and spot any emerging issues.

• Calmer cows

Milker injuries are common on-farm. Cows that are less familiar with their udders being touched can fidget and kick during cup attachment. ACC reports large numbers of injuries caused by cows kicking milkers.

However, when they have their foremilk stripped and teats inspected, cows become more accustomed to having their udders handled, so they're less likely to react during cup attachment.

Calmer cows also produce dung less frequently while being milked, kick the cups off less often, move through the dairy easily and produce less adrenalin and, thus, better milk let-down than stressed and anxious cows.

• Increased cure rates

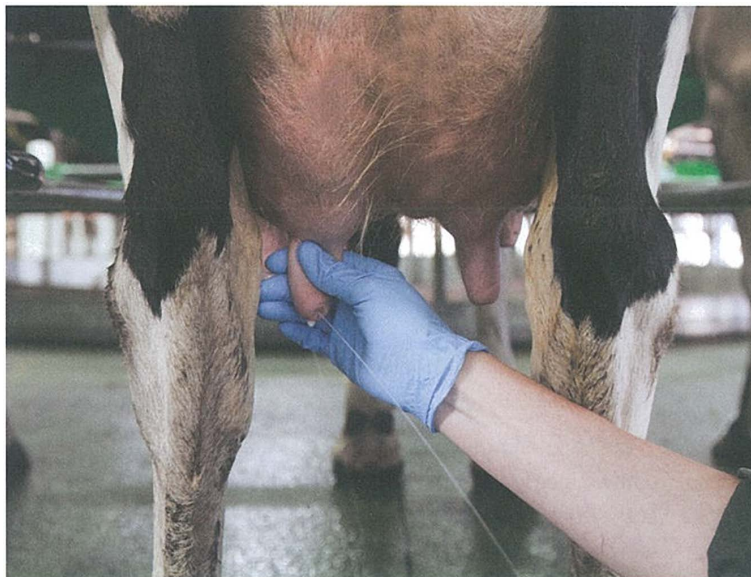
Early detection of mastitis increases the chance and speed of cure.

Reducing the risk

- In early lactation, foremilk strip regularly, initially, then implement strategic stripping. Monitor the bulk milk SCC and filter sock, and strip more regularly when suspicious about mastitis.

- Use gloves when foremilk stripping cows. Gloves have a smooth surface, which are easier to clean and harbour less dirt and bacteria than bare hands.
- Review teat-spraying procedures. Teat spraying after milking reduces bacteria left behind on the teats, which can include those left behind by foremilk stripping.
- Check teat spray coverage. To be effective, teat spray needs to cover all sides of the teats, as well as the teat tip; this can be achieved by manual and automatic spraying systems.

Learn more about mastitis management at dairynz.co.nz/mastitis



Myth

▶ Touching teats will increase the incidence of mastitis in cows.

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Not if hands and teats are kept clean. Foremilk stripping, to find new cases, and teat spraying after milking, to prevent new cases, provide effective control of mastitis.