



# Drying Off



Recently a round of Drying Off Discussion sessions were delivered throughout the Subtropical Dairy region. Dr Carl Hockey from RuralVet Pty Ltd facilitated the short, interactive sessions which focused on the 'drying off' strategy in dairy herds.



Drying off strategies in year-round calving herds can be challenging, but getting this process right can provide an excellent opportunity to create a better outcome for a cow in her next lactation and for the herd and the farm profitability overall. Dry cow treatments are used to treat either existing infections in a cow or prevent new infections from occurring in the dry period.

In a year-round calving herd, few farmers stop to analyse the dry-off process and the how and the why of what they are doing. The Drying Off Discussion sessions proved an excellent opportunity to reflect and revisit some of the common practices used on farms.

Blanket use of antibiotic therapies in animal production enterprises is under increasing scrutiny globally with many European countries introducing tighter rules and regulations. Australia is not at this stage, however, increasing costs, tighter regulations regarding milk quality and the risk of severe financial penalties due to antibiotic residues provide an incentive to hone treatment practices.



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At each of the Drying Off Discussions, a host farmer was asked to talk about their strategy for drying off. As you would expect, these strategies varied greatly, from no use of antibiotics through to blanket dry cow therapy with teat sealant. Each farm had their own system dependent on their herd size, cell counts, use of records, weather, time of year, staff and animal handling facilities.

As a generalisation, when it comes to drying off cows, it comes down to the five Rs:

- **Right cows** – Is the cow valuable enough to warrant therapy or is she at the end of her productive life? (Considerations include cell count data, clinical cases, unproductive teats, type of bacteria);
- **Right Time** – Have you got records to show she'll have the minimum period dry, that is no less than three weeks, but preferably six weeks. A cow's udder needs an opportunity for the cells to regenerate and repair themselves. Withholding periods for antibiotics also need to be considered.
- **Right production** – Is her milk production more than 12 litres? This is a general recommendation regarding the maximum milk production at drying off. Often though, farmers will have their own production cut-off based on

their own experience.

- **Right products** – Are you using an appropriate antibiotic? Have you cultured for bacterial type? Do you need to use an antibiotic? Are you using a teat sealant?
- **Right administration** – Carl demonstrated the correct administration of antibiotic dry cow therapy and teat sealants. Attendees were also given the opportunity to practice.

Remember that following drying off, cows should be held in a clean, dry environment until the teats have sealed. Daily visual checks for changes in the cow's udder following dry off are recommended.

Consult with your trusted herd veterinarian for advice specific to your needs when considering a change in dry cow treatment strategies.

Dairy Australia has a range of drying off resources on the website <https://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/DairyAustralia/Farm/Animal-management/Mastitis?keyword=drying%20off>. Scroll to the bottom of the page for Drying Off resources.

Dairy Australia also have some great webinar recordings on Youtube that may be useful. Please find the link for 'Rethinking the use of antibiotics at drying off' at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MAMzDvQwKA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MAMzDvQwKA)

**For more information on Mastitis Management and treatment options you can also download the Countdown Mastitis Toolkit.**