

# Managing Winter Dysentery in the Dairy Herd



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The winter season is upon us! One of the most common health challenges facing dairy herds as the colder temperature sets in is Winter Dysentery. This article will explain the disease, describe the telltale signs to watch for in your herd,

explain how the diagnosis is made and discuss supportive therapy options that are available to limit its negative effects on health and production.

## What is Winter Dysentery?

Winter Dysentery is a highly contagious GI disorder that affects housed adult dairy cattle primarily during winter. Current research indicates that it is caused by a particular strain of Coronavirus that attacks the intestinal lining of adult dairy cattle. This disease is typically spread through fecal-oral transmission; but viral particles present in respiratory secretions of affected animals may further enhance transmission. Winter dysentery can spread throughout an entire herd within 7 to 10 days. Death is rare and most animals will recover within a week.

## What are the signs?

A hallmark sign of Winter Dysentery is a sudden onset of explosive diarrhea. The diarrhea is usually dark green to black in color and may, at times, contain blood. Animals affected with Winter Dysentery could have some mild coughing, nasal discharge and general dehydration. Another sign of Winter Dysentery is a decrease in feed intake. Make sure to work with your nutritionist to keep a watchful eye on feed intakes at all times. Lowered body condition, caused by a decrease in feed intake, can have a detrimental effect on the animal. The combination of dehydration and decreased feed intake can lead to a drop in milk production. Milk production can decrease significantly (25%-95%) depending on how rapidly the disease is diagnosed and treated. This drop in milk production can take months to recover, decreasing your bottom line profit.

## How is it diagnosed?

The best way to diagnose Winter Dysentery is



to watch for the signs listed above. Often times it will start with one or two animals and quickly spread throughout the herd. Most veterinarians diagnose the disease by the characteristic signs of dark diarrhea that spreads from cow to cow throughout the barn. Because of the speed at which this disease spreads, it is important to catch the first one or two animals in the barn experiencing symptoms and begin an aggressive supportive treatment protocol.

There is an ELISA test available but it can take over a week to get the test results back. By that time, without implementing supportive measures for the cow, it may be too late to avoid the negative impacts of decreased milk production and dry matter intake.

## How is it treated or controlled?

1. Treat with Crystal Creek® Check™. Check™ will work in two ways. First, Check™ will help tie up the toxins produced by Winter Dysentery and rid them from the body. Secondly, Check™ has compounds that have been proven to

stimulate the immune system along the length of the GI tract, where the animal needs the most help. There are two different options to treat animals. If only dealing with a couple of animals, bolus the affected animals with 2 boluses of Check™ twice a day. If the whole herd is affected, feed Check™ bulk powder at 40 grams/head/day. Check™ bulk powder can be mixed into the grain or TMR. Continue feeding Check™ for approximately two to four days, or until the diarrhea is under control.

2. Feed Crystal Pellets™. Animals affected with Winter Dysentery will have a weakened immune system. Help support their immune system by feeding 4oz./head/day of Crystal Pellets™ for 7-10 days or until the intake and production issues are reversed.
3. Make sure cows have plenty of fresh water. One of the easiest ways to encourage a strong feed intake is to provide access to fresh, clean water; especially when the cows are battling dehydration from diarrhea.
4. Feed a highly palatable balanced ration. Many herds affected with Winter Dysentery will have a decreased feed intake. Deliver fresh feed every day and push up often to maintain feed intake levels. Work with your nutritionist to make sure the ration is well balanced.

5. If needed, IV fluid therapy for severely affected animals is helpful. Animals with Winter Dysentery have a tendency to decrease feed intake and lower their water intake. Animals experiencing severe dehydration should be given IV fluid therapy.
6. Sanitize boots and clothing after working with animals to reduce the risk of spreading the disease. Winter Dysentery can be spread easily from farm to farm. Any person that comes in contact with infected animals should be sanitizing boots and clothing before going to the next farm.
7. At this point, there is no vaccine available for Winter Dysentery so it is best to watch for symptoms in your herd and treat/control it before it has damaging side effects.

Don't let Winter Dysentery decrease your milk production and profitability. Check™ works great to reduce the negative impact it can have on your herd. Keep Check™ on hand so you are ready to act immediately. Call Crystal Creek® today to speak with our staff on how you can protect your herd!

Resources: "Intestinal Diseases in Cattle." The Merck Veterinary Manual. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Aug. 2014. <[http://www.merckmanuals.com/vet/digestive\\_system/intestinal\\_diseases\\_in\\_ruminants/intestinal\\_diseases\\_in\\_cattle.html](http://www.merckmanuals.com/vet/digestive_system/intestinal_diseases_in_ruminants/intestinal_diseases_in_cattle.html)>

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