A blocked teat is a teat that does not easily allow removal of milk, and can be a partial or complete blockage, in one or more of the cow’s teats, at any point in time. The cow may or may not find it painful. The three main causes of blocked teats are: 1) injury, 2) mastitis, and 3) genetics (inherited).

1) Injury (common and painful):

Injuries to teats can lead to partial or complete blockage that is temporary or permanent. Teats (especially the inside lining of the teat) are fragile. The following causes can damage them easily.

- stepped on (by the cow herself or by another cow)
- sucked on too vigorously by a cow’s own calf (or others calves or even cows)
- inappropriate milking technique over many years (excessively hard pulling)
- insertion of instruments into a teat by an animal health technician or veterinarian.

Successful treatment usually involves locally applied medicines, and occasionally surgery. Consult an experienced animal health technician or veterinarian with proven success with injured teats for proper treatment. Inexperienced surgeons often do more harm than good when putting instruments into a teat, and will not know when teat surgery is needed and likely to produce a good result in the long term.

To prevent injuries to the teats:

- cow stalls should be of the appropriate size and design (see stall fact sheet)
- young animals should be prevented from suckling each other
- gentle and proper milking techniques should be used at all times (see picture below)
  - Squeezing the teat, instead of pulling the teat, is more effective, and less traumatic to the teat. With practice it is just as quick as pulling, and your cow will have a longer productive life. Only young cows with small teats should be milked by teat-pulling.

![Diagram of teat squeezing]

- Squeezing the teat at its base between your first finger and thumb
- Then close each finger progressively down the teat
2) **Mastitis (common and painful)**

Mastitis is an infection of the udder. Severe mastitis can lead to thickened milk which can block the teat, partially or completely. If treated with antibiotics early on, the cow’s milk will return to normal and milk will come out of the teat easily again. **Surgery is not required to fix a blocked teat due to mastitis.** If the infection is left untreated, it can lead to scarring of the inside of the teat, which can lead to a permanently blocked teat. A veterinarian cannot fix a chronically blocked teat due to mastitis.

Blocked teats from mastitis can be prevented by:
- keeping the udder clean and dry through proper stall design and management
- using hygienic milking procedures

Refer to the mastitis fact sheet for further information on mastitis causes and prevention.

3) **Inherited (uncommon and not painful)**

Some cows can be born with one or more blocked teats. The teat can be blocked at various locations including, the base, in the middle or at the very tip. To prevent inherited blocked teat, you should avoid keeping offspring of cows that were born with a blocked teat.

Treatment: Unless the blockage is very minor, treatment (surgery) success is poor due to scar formation and re-blocking, even though temporary fixes appear to work in the short-term. Also, attempts to fix these blocked teats can lead to an infected or dead cow that used to be a healthy cow. The best option is to milk the 3 functional teats because 3 teats will produce almost as much milk as 4 teats.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact the following WSHGD animal health personnel:

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March 2010

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