

Cattle Emergencies

Cattle emergencies are high-stakes situations where minutes matter. Veterinary professionals categorize these as situations that threaten the immediate life of the animal or cause extreme suffering.

Here are the most common cattle emergencies that require urgent veterinary intervention:

1. Dystocia (Calving Difficulties)

This is arguably the most common emergency. It occurs when a cow or heifer cannot deliver a calf without assistance.

- **Signs:** Prolonged, unproductive labor (straining for more than 30-60 minutes without progress), abnormal calf presentation (feet backward, head turned back), or the cow ceasing to strain entirely due to exhaustion.
- **Urgency:** High. Delayed intervention can lead to the death of the calf and severe injury or death to the mother.

2. Acute Bloat

Bloat is the rapid accumulation of gas in the rumen (the largest stomach compartment). It can be "frothy" (caused by lush pasture) or "free gas" (caused by blockage or inability to belch).

- **Signs:** Significant swelling of the left flank, restlessness, kicking at the belly, drooling, and labored breathing.
- **Urgency:** Extreme. If not treated quickly, the pressure on the lungs can cause the animal to suffocate within minutes or hours.

3. Downer Cow (Recumbency)

A cow that goes down and cannot get up requires immediate investigation to determine the cause and attempt to get her standing again.

- **Causes:** Metabolic issues (Milk Fever/low calcium), nerve damage from calving, injuries (fractures/muscular tears), or severe infections.
- **Urgency:** High. A down cow is at risk for rapid muscle damage and nerve compression, making recovery less likely the longer she is down.

4. Uterine Prolapse

This occurs when the uterus turns inside out and protrudes from the vulva, usually shortly after calving.

- **Signs:** A large, reddish-pink mass hanging from the rear of the cow.
- **Urgency:** Critical. The uterus is extremely fragile, and exposure can lead to massive bleeding, infection, or damage to the organ.

5. Acute Hemorrhage or Traumatic Injury

Severe bleeding from accidents, wire cuts, or injury during handling.

- **Signs:** Profuse bleeding, deep wounds, inability to put weight on a limb, or obvious fractures.
- **Urgency:** High. Blood loss can be fatal quickly.

6. Acute Toxicoses (Poisoning)

Ingestion of toxic plants, chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides), or metals (lead).

- **Signs:** Sudden neurological signs (seizures, blindness, head pressing), rapid breathing, diarrhea, or sudden death.
- **Urgency:** High. Rapid identification and treatment are necessary to prevent further absorption of the toxin.

Emergency Summary Table

Emergency	Main Symptom	Critical Action
Dystocia	No progress during labor	Assess position & call vet if stalled
Bloat	Distended left flank	Insert stomach tube or use trocar
Downer Cow	Cannot stand	Move to comfortable spot, call vet
Prolapse	Uterus outside body	Keep cow calm, keep uterus clean & moist