

***Udder Hair Removal  
Larry Fox, DVM  
Washington State  
University***

The Pasteurized Milk Ordinance clearly states that udders should be routinely clipped to keep udder hair short. Logic dictates that keeping udder hair short can lead to reduced exposure to bacteria, improved milk somatic cell counts, a decrease in udder preparation time, an increase in milking speed, a decrease in bacterial counts of milk, improved teat disinfection function, help improve cleanliness of milker's hands and milking units, improved milk sediment scores and a reduction in the number of towels needed to wash and dry udders.

The Washington State University mastitis research group designed experiments to test the hypotheses concerning udder hair. For 11 months 218 cows were sampled monthly to determine mastitis infections. Each cow served as its own control. Teat skin swabbing solutions were also collected to determine the bacterial contamination of the teat skin. The number of new intra-mammary infections and the bacterial counts on the teat skin were almost the same for both udder halves; indicating no real benefit to udder hair removal. The trials examining the milk bacterial counts following udder hair removal was tested in 40 cows. The differences in bacterial counts between treatment groups were very small and not significant. The results of both trials do not support the contention that removal of udder hair will improve milk quality and reduce mastitis.

It could be argued that because the herd had excellent housing management, keeping cows clean and dry, and excellent milking technique, that udder hair removal was not necessary. However, it should be noted that because udder hair removal is stipulated by the PMO, it should be done as required. The PMO is revised every two years. Perhaps the requirement to remove udder hair is unnecessary and should be part of some revised PMO in the future.