

How to Use Boot Baths¹

Farms use footbaths to reduce the risk of spreading pathogens from one group of animals or from one farm to another. However, if poorly used, boot baths can be a waste of resources and leave a false sense of security.

People often avoid stepping into boot baths or just walk through them, without stopping to scrub their boots and leaving gross contamination behind. They fail to remove debris, use disinfectant too sparingly or too quickly for it to work, or change the solution too rarely.

To minimize the risk of tracking pathogens to or from your livestock:

- Provide clean, protective outer clothing and footwear (PPE) for visitors, and require that they wear them when entering areas that livestock occupy.
 - Rubber boots are easiest to clean and disinfect, but disposable booties work well when protection is only needed for a few minutes.
 - Require that visitors remove and leave behind all such protective clothing and footwear before they leave the farm.
- Provide boot baths at the entrance and exit of animal areas.
- Make sure that everyone who is allowed into livestock areas properly washes and then disinfects their footwear prior to entering and again when exiting those areas.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water before entering AND after leaving an animal area.

Maintain and use boot baths properly:

- Select disinfectants based on efficacy, cost, ease of use, and environmental friendliness. Phenolic compounds are commonly used, due to their efficacy in the presence of organic matter. See also [How to Clean and Disinfect FMD Virus](#).
- Mix solution to the proper concentration, according to the label instructions. (Boot bath solutions should also be kept from freezing and protected from rain to avoid over-dilution.)
- Scrub all dirt, manure and debris off of boots BEFORE stepping into the disinfectant solution. Organic material (dirt, manure, etc.) will prevent most disinfectants from working.
 - Use hose water and a scrub brush over a well-drained area or a preliminary bath filled with diluted detergent.
 - Rinse boots thoroughly to reduce the number of microorganisms present and minimize the amount of debris accumulating in the boot bath.
- Step into the boot bath and use a clean scrub brush to soak boots thoroughly in a clean solution of an appropriate disinfectant.
- Allow the disinfectant solution ample contact time with the boot surface. (Contact time will vary with the disinfectant selected. Consult the product label.)
- Change solutions regularly, depending on the amount of traffic, daily or when visibly dirty – in any case, at least every 2-3 days. For best results, replace disinfectant solution daily.

¹ Glenda Dvorak, [Disinfection 101](#) (CFSPH, Iowa State University, February 2005), pp. 16-17; [General Farm Biosecurity Practices – Boot Cleaning and Disinfection](#) (UVM, October 6, 2010). See also: [General Farm Biosecurity Practices – Disinfection in On-Farm Biosecurity](#) (UVM, October 6, 2010).