

Calf Scours

Right on the heels (and sometimes in the midst) of a successful calving season comes calf scours.

Calf scours (diarrhea) may seem of little consequence, but the experienced cattle operator is well aware of the implications of a calf with the runs. Calves with scours can rapidly become depressed and lethargic causing them not to suckle well. Combine lack of fluid intake with excessive fluid loss (diarrhea) and dehydration rapidly sets in. A dehydrated calf will become more depressed and can, in short order, no longer be able to get up or even raise their heads. Calves with scours, if not treated in a timely and appropriate fashion, can die of dehydration. Calf scours can be caused by a number of different pathogens (bugs).

What to do:

1. Ensure that all calves are up nursing (receiving the antibody rich immune boosting colostrum) as soon as possible after being born. Calves that receive adequate colostrum have a much decreased risk of developing scours as neonates. Early colostrum feeding means healthier calves!
 - a. As time passes, the calf's ability to absorb the antibodies in colostrum decreases.
 - b. Ideally, a calf should have nursed within the first hour of life
 - c. If a calf was born with assistance (a difficult pull or C-section), milking the cow and feeding the calf by bottle or tube will ensure that they receive the antibodies they need.
2. Monitor calves closely during the first several weeks of life.
 - a. Keep track of attitude
 - i. Are the calves as a group and as individuals getting up to nurse, run, and follow the herd?
 - ii. Do the calves ears look alert or are the drooping?
 - iii. Do the calves have messy tails and anuses (possible diarrhea)?
3. When you see a calf that is lethargic, take note and investigate further.
 - a. They may be enjoying a nice nap after a run in the sun
 - b. They may be sick
 - i. Check for a messy tail
 1. If clean – don't forget the calf! Be keep track of that individual and ensure that it is alert the next time check the herd.
 2. If messy – Scours! Activate your treatment protocol.
4. Scours Treatment Protocol
 - a. Make a note of the calf ID and determine age.
 - b. Take body temperature with a rectal thermometer and record.
 - c. Determine hydration status and record.

% Dehydrated	Eyeball Position	*Skin Remains Tented (sec)	Mucous Membranes
Normal	Normal	<1	Moist
1-5	Normal	1-4	Moist
6-8	Slightly sunken	5-10	Tacky
9-10	Gap between eyeball and surrounding tissue	11-15	Tacky to dry
11-12	Large gap and very sunken	16-45	Dry

- d. If calf exhibits signs of **dehydration** but is still **able to get up**.
 - i. Administer Hydra-Lyte (commercial electrolyte solution)
 - 1. Keep this on hand so you can use it at the first indication of dehydration
 - 2. Follow instructions on label
 - ii. Be sure that the calf is continuing to nurse. If not, bottle feed or tube feed milk. Do not withhold food while a calf is scouring – they need the energy
 - iii. Oral Pepto-Bismol may be used to help soothe the intestinal tract of a calf.
 - 1. 3-4 ounces every 2-3 hours.
 - iv. Antibiotics may be warranted to address scours of bacterial origin and/or protect against secondary bacterial infections.
- e. If calf is **unable to get up** and has scours this is an indication of **severe dehydration**.
 - i. Time to initiate IV fluid therapy as soon as possible (most producers call their veterinarian at this point).
 - ii. If calf body temperature below 100 degrees Fahrenheit, calf needs to be provided warmth from an external source (take indoors).

Calf scours can lead to significant time and financial investment. Monitoring calves closely so that therapy is provided in a timely manner can save both time and money.

Additional management strategies can help reduce the incidence of scours. This will be addressed in a follow up document.