



LOOK OUT FOR

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How to tackle calf scours

Scours is the greatest single cause of death in young calves. **Debbie James** speaks to vet Mike John of Fenton Veterinary Practice, Haverfordwest, to find out what can be done to manage the risk

What is scours and how can it affect calf health?

* Calf scours is a clinical sign associated with several diseases, characterised by diarrhoea. The scouring calf loses fluids and rapidly dehydrates and suffers from electrolyte loss and acidosis. Left untreated, death typically occurs within 24 hours.

What are the main causes of scours?

* E coli, cryptosporidium, rotavirus, coronavirus and salmonella. More than one cause is often present. It helps to establish the likely cause as soon as possible because there are excellent specific treatments that can reduce the build-up of the pathogen before it reaches dangerous levels.

How can scours be prevented?

* Hygiene and feeding colostrum. All prevention measures focus on avoiding the build-up of pathogens in the environment and boosting the calf's immunity so it can fight

off the infection.

Prompt treatment, isolation of cases and cleansing and disinfection of pens and all equipment between calves is essential. The calf's immunity is essentially down to nutrition, particularly colostrum management.

Should I give antibiotics?

* Antibiotics are not indicated for most causes of scour in young calves. Oral antibiotics may inhibit the intestines' natural defences.

Also, they can create resistance in bacteria, which harmlessly live in the calves' guts, but are dangerous to humans. There are some situations where antibiotics are justified, for example, salmonellosis, and these should be discussed with your vet.

What other treatments might be necessary?

* Halofuginone can be effective in the treatment and prevention of



Calf immunity can be increased by good colostrum management.

cryptosporidiosis. Sometimes faecal samples may indicate that cryptosporidium is the only pathogen involved in the scour and sometimes rotavirus or coronavirus may also be involved.

Halofuginone could be used in both circumstances. The calf might cope with a mild rotavirus infection or a mild cryptosporidiosis infection, but the two often occur together and can be devastating.

How long can I withdraw milk from my calves while feeding oral rehydration therapy?

* Milk should never be withdrawn for more than 24 hours. If it is, it will starve the calf and create more problems.

It should not be mixed with traditional oral rehydration therapy (ORT) as it disrupts the natural digestion.

In order to both provide enough milk, but also feed enough oral rehydration therapy to avoid dehydration and acidosis.

Providing ORT and milk at different times is a good option, particularly for larger calves.

Are there any risks that humans might catch it?

* Cryptosporidiosis and salmonellosis are both zoonoses – diseases that can pass from animals to humans. Therefore, all calves that are scouring should be treated with care.

My neighbour says they never have a problem with calf scours. Are they telling the truth?

* There is a great variety of calf-rearing systems. The easiest way of applying changes is to copy someone else who is doing it well. Ask to visit during feeding.