

My calves are scouring – what action should I take?

CALF scour can be a major cause of poor growth and mortality.

The first thing we have to concern ourselves with is providing prompt and effective treatment and then we need to find out what is causing the calves to scour in the first place before deciding what we can do to try and prevent it.

Treating scouring calves can be very time-consuming for the farmer and can be very detrimental for the calf with the effects of scour ranging in severity from reduced growth rates with poorly thriven calves to death.

Therefore as with many things the approach of prevention is far better than cure.

What treatments are best?

The most important aspect of treating calf scour in the first instance is fluid replacement therapy to counteract the effects of dehydration caused by fluid loss from the gut in the scour.

There are many forms of oral fluid replacement therapy available most

CALF SCOUR

Alistair Couper, of Capontree Veterinary Centre, looks at how to prevent and treat calf scour

of which contain high levels of salt to aid absorption of fluid from the gut and counter dehydration, high levels of bicarbonate to counteract the effects of acidosis and high levels of dextrose to provide a source of readily absorbable energy for the calf.

If the gut is severely damaged by the disease process then oral fluid therapy is not sufficient to revive the calf and intravenous fluid therapy is required, involving your veterinary surgeon putting the calf on a drip.

Why is my calf scouring?

There are many infectious agents which can cause calf scour including viruses, bacteria and parasites, the most significant of which for young calves are rotavirus, coronavirus, E coli, Salmonella and cryptosporidia and for older calves coccidiosis and gut worms.

The best way to find out which of these are involved in causing a scour outbreak is to take a faecal sample to your vet so that they can either check it in their practice laboratory or send it to the local laboratory.

What can I do to prevent the same thing happening next year?

Many of the infectious agents which cause calf scour exist in the environment and wet, dirty or inadequate bedding allows these to accumulate, making cleanliness vital to reduce the risk of a scour outbreak. Regular mucking out and disinfection of calving boxes and calf pens with the use of plenty of clean straw bedding is essential to reduce the build-up of pathogens.

Are there any other management practices that



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I can use to help?

Colostrum is nature's protector for young animals, including calves so ensuring an adequate uptake of good quality colostrum at an early age is vital for the ongoing health and well-being of young calves.

Calves need to take in six pints of colostrum in the first six hours of life and if they get that then they can cope with a lot that life throws at them. Calves need to be strong and get to their feet and suckle quickly so

if they don't do this then feeding them with colostrum using a feeding bag is an essential part of their early management.

Can I boost the benefit of colostrum?

The protection that colostrum gives against many of the calf scour pathogens can be boosted by the use of vaccines. Once you know which pathogens are present on your farm it is best to discuss the benefits of a vaccination program with your vet.

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