



Scours: Prevention + Treatment

Calving season is upon us and with newborn calves often comes scouring calves. This winter has been particularly warm and wet which will likely continue into the spring calving season. This weather harbors the perfect environment to grow and spread the pathogens that cause scours. Scours in young calves is most commonly caused by cryptosporidium (a parasite), and rotavirus and coronavirus (viruses). It can also be caused by *E. coli* and salmonella (bacteria). The common thread between these organisms is their ability to cause life threatening dehydration due to scours.

To help reduce the incidence of scouring calves it is best to keep older calves separate from younger calves during calving season. If you are calving on pasture this can be as simple as moving the cows that have not calved (or have a later due date) to a different pasture every month. While calving in a barn, it is essential to clean the calving pen between each calving event and group pairs based on the calf's age.

When it comes to treating scours, unfortunately it isn't as simple as just giving a shot. Scouring calves need to be adequately rehydrated. This can be accomplished in three ways: oral fluids (electrolytes), subcutaneous (SQ) fluids, or intravenous (IV) fluid therapy.

Oral fluids are the easiest to administer and can be very effective when used at the onset of scours. Electrolytes should be given twice daily, or as often as the cow will let you. If the calf is taken away from the cow it is essential to feed milk replacer in addition to electrolytes. The best way to manage this is to feed milk replacer twice daily, 12 hours apart with electrolyte feedings in between. By alternating feedings, the milk replacer provides the calf with the energy it needs to grow and maintain its body temperature, while the electrolytes will more rapidly rehydrate the calf.

For calves that are still upright, but are lethargic with sunken eyes despite electrolyte therapy, subcutaneous (SQ) fluids can be extremely effective. SQ fluids, such as Lactated Ringer's solution, should be given 1 liter at a time under the calf's skin. Fluids should be administered using IV tubing and a needle over the shoulders and hips, ideally in four separate locations.

In cases where calves are unable to stand, reluctant to lift their head, or are "flat out", intravenous (IV) fluids are likely warranted. IV fluids are the most rapid way to rehydrate a calf and require the placement of an intravenous catheter which can administer larger volumes of fluid more rapidly. Catheters and IV fluid supplies can be purchased to administer IV fluids on your own. However, placing a sterile catheter in a severely dehydrated animal can be tricky and may require further veterinary assistance.