

# Scours happens!

It can be so easy to point fingers when things go wrong - sometimes at other people, the weather, the neighbour's dog... And sometimes at ourselves. Alas, in the cattle world, we know that scours happen. Unfortunately, there is no easy fix, and so I would like to provide a brief overview of areas to examine when dealing with calf scours.

Before we get started, I always ask – is the “problem” actually a problem? Pre-weaning calf mortality rates should be less than 5%, with scours, pneumonia and septicemia being the leading causes of death in calves. What is your calf mortality rate? How many calves are you treating for scours? Not only are there immediate costs to treating a calf for scours, but future losses with decreased weight gain, an increased risk of culling and decreased reproductive performance.

“So how do we fix it, doc?” I think we can all acknowledge that there is no easy fix as scours is a very multi-layered issue. Here is a brief list of areas to consider when dealing with scours, along with quantifiable points to aim for success.

- **ENVIRONMENT, ENVIRONMENT, ENVIRONMENT:** from the calving pen to the calf pens, the cleaner the environment the better for the baby calf. How many possible “bugs” are getting into the calf through its nose, mouth, or navel from the moment it hits the ground? A high animal density on pasture, in the calving pen and in calf pens can increase the disease burden. Are calving pens and calf pens cleaned and/or disinfected between animals?
  - A fast, portable, on-farm test of cleanliness can be done using a swab and luminometer. Ask your herd veterinarian to bring it along on their next visit!
- **Colostrum:** clean colostrum of adequate quality and quantity delivered in a timely manner to the calf is critical to provide the calf with protective immune cells (antibodies).
  - There are various, easy-to-use, on-farm devices available for measuring colostrum quality.
  - Simple blood tests on calves can reveal if they are appropriately absorbing the antibodies from the colostrum into their bloodstream.
- **Equipment cleanliness:** bottles, nipples, esophageal feeders, milk lines, bucket milkers, pails, etc. can be a source of contamination. Ensure thorough cleaning protocols (rinse, wash, sanitize and dry) for each piece of equipment that colostrum and milk touch before entering the calf's system.
  - Milk and colostrum samples can be sent to a lab for bacterial counts to determine if the fluid is “clean” or “too dirty”.
- **Stressors:** any stress to the calf can compromise their immune system. A draft, pen movements and increased animal handling can decrease a calf's ability to fight off diseases such as scours.
- **Nutrition:** a potentially overlooked area in the case of scours is adequate nutrition of the dam, appropriate mixing of calf milk replacers, sufficient volume of milk delivered, and calf access to clean water and clean feed (in a clean bucket/trough!).



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- **Vaccines:** there are many vaccines available that provide protection from various scour-causing bacteria and viruses. Some are given to the dam, who then produces protective antibodies and passes them to the calf through the colostrum. Other vaccines are given directly to the calf at birth. If you are interested, please speak with your veterinarian to determine a suitable scour vaccine program for your herd.

In the meantime, how do we treat it? This can slightly vary depending on when the calves are getting scours, but most important is FLUID therapy. As soon as you notice a calf that doesn't drink its entire meal, or has a slower drinking speed, start the electrolytes! Don't wait until a calf is down, not drinking and has sunken eyes to start them on fluids. Anti-inflammatories are almost always warranted in these situations as well. Depending on the age of the calf and severity, antibiotics or other medications may be prescribed by your veterinarian.

When the scours happen, hold your head up. You are not in this alone so talk to a trusted friend/vet and with each day we will continue to farm on.

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## **Bulk tank antibiotic residue testing**

Due to popular demand, limited testing options available to farmers, and our clinics acquisition of more sensitive testing equipment, Heartland Veterinary Services will be providing bulk tank testing for specific antibiotic residues. Please call us for more details.

## **Important changes to our Covid-19 protocols**

With the increasing presence of Covid-19 in our area, our team is taking additional precautions during our farm visits, as highlighted below, to help mitigate the spread of this disease in our community. Please be aware that as this pandemic develops, we may have to adjust our procedures in response.

### **Veterinary farm visits**

- Once on farm, we will try to maintain a distance of at least six feet from people wherever practically possible
- Care will be taken to wash and disinfect hands and contacted tools and equipment before re-entering our vehicle
- **A mask will be worn whenever practically possible, especially in closed air spaces or when physical distancing is not possible. We would like our clients to do the same while we are on farm.**

### **Technician farm visits**

- Techs will continue to assist veterinarians as necessary. The same precautions as above will apply
- Technicians will continue to provide services, such as dehorning, but we ask that no farm personnel are in the immediate vicinity during their visit

### **Clinic procedures**

- Our clinic will remain open, but business hours may be subject to change
- Clients will be met at the door by one of our customer care representatives
- Purchases will be set out at the door
- Laboratory samples will be received at the door

**If you have experienced any Covid-like symptoms or have had exposure to someone with symptoms, we urge you to please notify us before your next vet visit so we can take the appropriate precautions.**

We thank you for assistance in helping us continue to provide veterinary care while considering the health of yourselves and our staff.

Stay healthy!

