

MARCH NEWSLETTER 2002

Next to pneumonia, scours in calves is the second leading economic loss a dairyman can face when raising youngstock. In calves scours can lead to decreased growth rates, potentially extensive time involvement in treatment and even death loss. As with most diseases that affect animals, the best way to limiting scours in your herd is to provide the animals with good immune protection and to prevent their exposure to scour causing pathogens. Even the best immune system will fail if a calf receives a high enough dose of scour causing pathogens.

PREVENTION:

When it comes to prevention the old saying of “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” is without question the best policy. Calves should be born in a clean dry environment free of manure. If a calving pen is used it should be cleaned and rebedded between uses. . If animals are calved in their stalls, these stalls must be clean and well bedded. The floor behind the cow should be cleaned, covered with lime and even bedded as well. A clean gutter grate placed behind the cow is also an absolute must. As many of you know, a calf that is allowed to be born in the gutter, frequently succumbs to scours in the first few days of life and many times ends up dying before it is one month old.

Secondly the calf should not be allowed to suck from the cow after birth. The natural method of getting colostrum in the calf works relatively well in beef cows out on pasture, but in dairy animals in the barn it leads to further scour exposure. Frequently the newborn is quite unstable and in its first unsteady attempts to find the udder in will suck on just about anything. Almost all cows have manure on them at a height that the calf can reach and the result is scour exposure.

The third line of prevention comes in the calves own housing. Scour prevention does not stop after birth. In fact, many cases of scours are caused by exposure in the first few days of life. Calves should be kept **isolated from other animals**, again in a clean dry environment. Even though they are older, calves will still suck on anything, and any manure that is consumed is another potential scour case. Fecal matter the size of a quarter can contain literally billions of scour causing pathogens, so it doesn't take much to make a calf sick. Also any pails or instruments used to feed these calves need to be kept clean of dirt, manure and milk residues. They should be washed between uses and not shared between animals. Using the above techniques will help prevent your calves from being exposed to scour pathogens through its first days of life.

IMMUNITY:

The number one way to provide your calf immunity is to give it an adequate dose of a good quality colostrum in the first couple of hours after birth. This colostrum contains the antibodies that will provide the calf protection from scours until its own immune system develops properly at about 4-5 months of age. The current recommendation is 1 gallon of colostrum at birth. If a calf will not eat a full gallon or close to that volume, then it is recommended that it be tube fed the remaining amount. If you do not know how to do this contact one of our doctors and we will be happy to assist you in learning this procedure.

If you are still having problems on your dairy, there are many vaccines and antibody products that are available on the market to help provide calves with increased immunity. These can be given to both the calf and the cow prior to birth of the calf. If your dairy is experiencing problems with scours, please contact your veterinarian and we can recommend a product or products that will best suit your needs and the operation of your dairy.

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