

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information contact: Wendie Powell
Livestock Production Agent, Wildcat Extension District
wendiepowell@ksu.edu, (620) 784-5337

Calf Scours

Calf diarrhea, also called scours, is a very costly problem for many producers. Scours are only a symptom of underlying disease that plagues the animal. Dehydration and chemical imbalances are the actual causes of the animal's demise.

Several pathogens can cause severe diarrhea. The impact of the various germs is determined by the calf's age and the integrity of its immune system. If the calf doesn't receive the proper amount of colostrum, it will be more vulnerable to pathogens.

The most common bacterial cause is *E. coli*. It typically affects calves one to five days old, causing severe watery diarrhea, yellow or white colored. *Clostridium perfringens* is another bacterium that can be just as fatal in young calves, coming on so suddenly in some situations that death occurs without symptoms. *C. perfringens* is usually associated with an increase in the calf's diet. If management practice or weather causes a long interval between meals, and a calf consequently overconsumes; the proper environment has been established for the bacteria to grow.

Two viruses cause scours, rotavirus, and coronavirus. They both affect the small intestines. Symptoms include ongoing diarrhea that depletes the animal's nutrients. The coronavirus produces more severe symptoms; bloody stools or increased straining.

Two types of protozoa cause diarrhea in calves but have low mortality rates. *Cryptosporidia* leads to nutrient removal, animals usually exhibit good appetites but lose weight. Coccidiosis, however, is more stressed, causing mild to severe bloody scours, decreased appetite, sluggishness, and dehydration.

The key is to prevent the disease from occurring in the first place. A good producer should maximize colostrum transfer, increase sanitation, reduce stressors such as overcrowding or poor nutrition and vaccinate bred cows for *E. coli*, rotavirus, coronavirus, and *C. perfringens* at three and six days before calving.

When dealing with an outbreak, good hygiene, dry conditions, and isolation of infected animals are advised. To address individual animals, correct fluid deficits first. Then fix the electrolyte imbalances with powders. Young animals have little energy reserves. Provide oral or IV fluids containing glucose or dextrose supplements to build energy.

A broad-spectrum antibiotic may be used in some types of infection. Antibiotics only work against bacteria. If the infection is viral, antibiotics may prevent a secondary bacterial infection from occurring. It is important to consult with your veterinarian since they will know what diseases are prevalent in your area.

For more information, contact Wendie Powell, Livestock Production Agent, (620) 784-5337, wendiepowell@ksu.edu.

#

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service
K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of K-State Research and Extension, Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts.