

Calf-Link



SCOURS ALERT!

Sometimes hearing the words “you’re not the only one with this issue” can be comforting, but a shed full of scouring calves is not something you would wish on your worst enemy. It seems this is becoming a very scoury season for calf rearers, with notifications of scours coming from all areas of our practice and a range of causes identified.

In this edition we will be focusing on scours - the what, how and why of scours and how to implement management strategies. If you have been having issues, please get in touch so we can provide some specific advice for your situation, to get the calves back on track as soon as possible.

Infectious or Environmental?

Scours can have infectious (ie caused by a virus, bacteria or parasite) or environmental (eg nutritional, weather, stress) causes, or a combination of the two. The circumstances around the outbreak can give some idea as to the cause. For example, if you have just switched from whole to powdered milk and many calves appear scoury but still bright, it is likely nutritional. However, if you have had a day with a few calves scouring and off colour and the next day they are more unwell and new calves are also affected, it is likely to be an infectious cause. That said, it is best to get the scours of four or five calves tested so that you know for certain what you are dealing with and how to combat it. We offer in-clinic fecal testing for all infectious causes of scours (except Salmonella) so answers can normally be provided the same day.

If your calves have had scours in the previous season, the risk recurrence is quite high. Nasty strains of infectious bugs can persist within an apparently healthy herd from season to season, or within the calf-rearing environment. If you have rotavirus for example, it would be considered a high risk for seasons to come, and vaccination is even more strongly recommended to reduce this risk. Likewise, problems with the sheds themselves or management techniques can be carried over from one season to the next. If you have a bug in your shed, consider options for rearing any further calves this season in a different shed or perhaps making a big call to rear no more calves this year.

If you are selling calves, but at the same time dealing with your own scouring calves, please consider the potential impact on the people buying the calves. All calves on your property are potentially exposed to the bug and can carry it to the buyer’s calf sheds, causing another outbreak to establish there.

Which disinfectant should I be using?

Virkon S[®] has proven activity against 18 virus families. It can be used on all surfaces including calf sheds.

Vetacide[®] is active against a wide range of micro-organisms, even in the presence of organic matter. This is a good disinfectant for general purpose use such as calving equipment, scrubbing down waterproofs, etc.

Vetsan Concentrate[®] is a high activity sanitiser for all surfaces, including animal housing. It is safe to spray when calves are in the shed, making it an ideal product to reduce environmental contamination of rotavirus, coronavirus, and other common causes of calf scours, in calf sheds.

Envirosan QHF[®] is for animal bedding and housing. It is effective against a wide range of bacteria, fungi and viruses. A minimum contact time of 10 minutes is recommended. Good for general use.

Management Practices

Management of calf scours comes down to hygiene and hydration.

Hygiene Practices

- Wash down all feeders, bottles, tubes, etc with a disinfectant solution after each use.
- Feed sick calves last - don't go anywhere near them before feeding the other calves.
- If possible, have separate overalls, boots and gloves for dealing with the sick calves, or even have different people feeding the different groups.
- Have a foot bath at the entrance to each pen (and make sure everyone knows how to use it!)
- The shed with the sick calves in should be considered contaminated. If possible, new calves coming in should be completely isolated or better still, taken to a new shed.
- Anyone not responsible for rearing the calves should not enter the calf shed, as they can potentially spread disease between sheds or to other areas of the farm.
- Make sure gloves are being used and people who are working with calves are washing their hands before eating. A lot of the causes of calf scours can be zoonotic, meaning they can be spread to people too. This is particularly important for calf rearers with young families as the calves' bugs can easily be transferred on to children at home.

Hydration

Treatment of calves involves addressing the actual cause where possible with products specific to each bug. Antibiotics don't work on viruses but may help prevent secondary bacterial infections. Products like Rotagen can be used as both preventative and treatment options and can come in combinations for those sheds dealing with multifactor scours.

The actual killer of scouring calves is not the bugs themselves but the dehydration and complications that follow dehydration. Keeping the calves hydrated is key. Calves must have continual access to water, even if electrolytes are being offered ad lib. Alternating feeds of electrolytes and milk and ensuring calves get 3 feeds a day is very important to keep up fluid and energy levels. Remember not all electrolytes can be mixed with milk - only Diarrest and Biopect have that claim.

With the huge number of scours products on the market, below is a breakdown of electrolytes and other products you may consider using as part of your treatment of calf scours.

Electrolytes - What to use & when?

Revive[®] comes as either a syrup or a powder sachet, and provides both electrolytes and energy to the calf. Electrolytes help correct the acidosis that scours cause, and rehydrate the calf. It is best used when the calf is scouring but still standing.

Diarrest[®] comes in 250g sachet only and is considered one of the premium products. The combination of electrolytes, energy substrates, rice flour and starch means that this product can be used as a long term treatment (a few days). It rehydrates, corrects acidosis and provides energy. Unlike most electrolytes, Diarrest can be mixed with milk. Good choice for those calves that are unwilling to stand.

Enerlect[®] is similar to Revive, in that it provides electrolytes and energy. It comes in a 20kg tub and is a cost-effective option when many calves are affected. It can be fed ad lib to those calves that need a bit of a boost, especially if recovering from a previous case of scours.

Bobby Bind[®] has NO withhold so can be used on bobby calves that are just a bit loose from a nutritional upset. There are no antibiotics or rehydration available from this product so it should not be used to treat infectious causes of scours.

Bentonite 'fines' are great to have on hand as a binder for calves that have nutritional scours. Use with caution, as if there are bacteria involved, it will slow their passage from the gut and it has no rehydrating or antibacterial activity.

Biopect[®] is a newer product on the market that appears to be working well. It contains electrolytes, energy and pectin and is able to be mixed with milk. It can be used for calves recovering from scours or to help maintain gut health in otherwise healthy calves. It has no withholding so can be used in all calves.