

## Producer Newsletter – Calf Diarrhea

A common problem seen in the spring is calf diarrhea, or “*scours*”. There are many causes of scours, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites, and nutritional issues. Mixed infections are common and sometimes it can be difficult to determine which pathogen is the real problem.

Most viral, bacterial, and parasitic pathogens are transmitted via the fecal – oral route. If you are interested, we are happy to discuss diagnostic options to help decide what is causing scours in your herd – this may involve a fecal sample or collecting samples from a deceased animal.



Another thing to keep in mind is that some of these pathogens can be spread from your calves to you and your family, so good biosecurity protocols around your farm will help to keep everyone safe.

Risk factors for scours include:

- Poor colostrum management
- High pathogen load in the environment – for example, wet, dirty bedding or overcrowding
- Wide range of ages in calves in the same pasture

Having a scours vaccine as part of your vaccination protocol is a valuable tool, but is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to managing and preventing scours!

One of the main concerns associated with scours is **dehydration** – calves lose a lot of fluid in the stool and often are not sucking adequately to replace the lost fluid. Sometimes diarrhea is severe enough that calves cannot physically keep up with their fluid loss through oral supplementation. Diarrhea can cause imbalances in the calf’s pH and electrolytes which contribute to their symptoms. Furthermore, damage to the gut can increase the chance that bacteria can enter the calf’s system and cause a systemic infection/sepsis.

If your calf is still bright and alert, capable of standing, and has a suckle reflex, you likely will be able to treat it on farm through a combination of milk supplementation and oral electrolyte solutions.

More severe clinical signs to watch for include:

- Weakness and an inability to stand or sit up
- Poor or absent suckle reflex
- Sunken eyes
- Dry gums

**Intravenous fluids** become necessary when the clinical signs mentioned above are noticed. This is where we come in! We will hook up your calf to intravenous fluids to help replace the fluid that they have already lost and help return them to a normal fluid balance. A physical exam will also help us decide whether antibiotics or non-steroidal anti-inflammatories are necessary and will help us give you a prognosis for your calf. As mentioned above, sending a fecal sample (or tissue samples) will help us identify the underlying cause of the diarrhea. Depending on the state of your calf, we will decide whether additional supplementation, such as sugar/dextrose or bicarbonate is necessary. We will also give oral supplementation with milk so that your calf receives nutrition with added probiotics to help re-establish the normal balance in your calf’s gut.

Not sure whether your calf needs to come visit our hospital? Give us a call and we will be able to help!

Your team at the Edson Veterinary Clinic