

Recognising And Treating Calf Scours

1: Healthy calves;

are hungry, active, and curious. Calves with scours are likely:

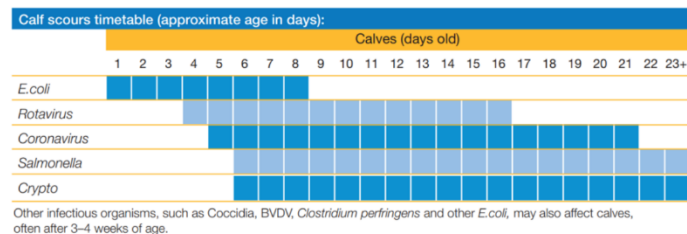
- To be more lethargic and inactive
- To have a loss of appetite
- To be isolated and uncurious about environment and activities.

2: Use Symptoms to Determine a Calf's Condition

Use the tent test to determine skin elasticity and level of dehydration. If a calf's nose and mouth appear dry or the eyes appear sunken, then it may be suffering from serious dehydration. Dehydrated and sick calves will also have abnormal body temperature.

3: Correct Diagnosis of the Cause of Scours

Calves are susceptible to the various causes of calf scours at different ages, which are outlined in the calf scours timetable.



Nutritional scours will probably be very liquid and white. Scours associated with Rota virus, a common cause of scours, will be pale yellow to brown and watery often with a rancid smell. Calf scours caused by parasites are more likely to have blood in the manure.

- Take a rectal temperature - if greater than 39.5 degrees C, call the vet.
- Take a faecal sample BEFORE treatment, and store in a designated chilly bag or fridge. Remember to take great care with hygiene - you cant take a faecal sample from the floor of the shed as it will be contaminated. The faecal sample can be sent to the laboratory and checked for viral, bacterial and/or parasitic causes so that you can identify your 'enemy' and work out the best course of treatment. In all cases fluid therapy must be the mainstay of treatment, whatever the cause of the scour.

4: Antibiotics:

Antibiotics are only effective against bacteria. They have no effect on viruses or parasites and will not correct dehydration. As such, antibiotics should only be used in scouring calves if:

- Laboratory or calf-side tests indicate pathogenic bacteria such as *E. coli* or *Salmonella* have been diagnosed
- There is blood in the faeces, suggestive of severe damage to the gut

- The calf is very depressed, weak or unable to stand, suggestive of toxins (produced by pathogenic bacteria) present in the blood

If a veterinarian prescribes antibiotics, it is essential the correct dose is given by the correct route for the correct duration. Clear records of all treatments should be kept, noting the calf ID, dates of treatment, nature of treatment and outcome. All treated calves should be clearly identified and designated feeding equipment used. Sick calves should be fed and treated last.

Blanket use of antibiotics or medicating large groups of calves should be avoided whenever possible and only ever done under the advice of a veterinarian.

Antibiotics and other veterinary drugs should be stored in a secure cupboard or the fridge (depending on the specific drug), out of the reach of children. All staff responsible for administering veterinary drugs should ensure they are adequately trained in this procedure.

5: Treat Scours promptly.

Prompt treatment, including re-hydration of a dehydrated calf, provides the best chance of quick recovery and avoiding a critical condition.

6: Use Proper Sanitation Methods.

Scours can be contagious. Properly cleaning and sanitizing equipment used for care and feeding can prevent spreading of infectious bacteria, viruses, and parasites to other animals. Always feed sick calves after feeding healthy ones to avoid spreading any infectious diseases further.

7: Separate Sick Calves.

Isolate sick calves to a 'sick pen', ideally in a different shed. This should be warm with deep (20cm), soft bedding. Feed and treat sick calves LAST to prevent spread of 'bugs' to healthy calves. This will reduce the chance of contaminating other calves or causing a wide spread outbreak.

A calf that has a loose white stool, but is eating and drinking normally as well as romping around like a normal healthy calf may not need treatment.