



Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc.

Calf Scours Overview:

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The Importance of Colostrum

The major factor influencing survival of calves is the level of immunity at the onset of diarrhea. The calf must get colostrum! The level of immunity required for calves born and confined in a farm yard is much higher than for calves born and "mothered" out on the range.

2. Hypothermia:

Often calves that have "crashed" are hypothermic (low temperature). If calves feel cold, have no sucking reflex but are not dehydrated, these calves are probably too "cold." This could be confirmed by taking their temperature with an inexpensive digital thermometer. Newborn calves with a temperature less than 35°C (96°F) are considered hypothermic and should be treated. They will not warm up on their own. These calves must be "warmed up" before they will absorb fluids given orally.

3. If Calves Appear Cold:

- a) Treating dehydrated calves that are hypothermic, may not be successful without warming them up.
- b) Hypothermic calves should be:
 - tubed with warm fluids
 - put in a "hot box"
 - if really "cold" put in a hot water bath [Less than 30°C (86°F)]

4. Fluid and Electrolytes:

If calves get sick between 5 and 25 days of age, fluid therapy to correct dehydration and acidosis is the cornerstone of any treatment.

- a) It is important to correct the dehydration, acidosis and electrolyte imbalance caused by scours.
- b) If the calf is down and severely depressed, I.V. (intravenous) therapy is probably required.
- c) In most cases, if the calf is still able to stand, electrolytes given orally by tube will help.

5. Antimicrobial:

Some veterinarians believe that when calves develop diarrhea between 5 and 25 days of age the cause is rarely bacterial, and therefore believe that antibiotics may do more harm than good.

- a) Oral preparations (scour pills) are of limited value and are rarely indicated, except in calves greater than six weeks of age with bloody diarrhea.
- b) Injectable antibiotics are more effective, have a broader range of activity, and are more appropriate for several conditions than are oral preparations.
- c) Often there are several disease processes occurring, e.g. navel infection and diarrhea simultaneously. Under these circumstances, an injectable antibiotic is the right choice.

CALF SCOURS: TRIAGE & TREATMENT

1. To Check for Passive Transfer:

It is difficult to assess if a calf has received enough colostrum. ***If in doubt, tube the calf with colostrum.*** If there are a lot of sick or dead calves, a series of blood samples to look for transferred immunoglobulins is the only way to make an assessment.

2. Diarrhea But Not Depressed:

a) If the calf is bright, alert, responsive, and not depressed watch closely. Immediate treatment is not necessary.

3. Diarrhea and Slightly Depressed:

- a) Allow the calf to nurse the cow as normal. Do not remove the calf from the cow.
- b) Tube with 2 litres commercial electrolytes, one with an alkalizing compound in it, twice daily until manure begins to firm or calf is no longer depressed. If more than two days of therapy is required, contact veterinarian. Make sure the calf continues to nurse.

4. Diarrhea, Eyes Sunken (Dehydrated) & Very Depressed:

This calf requires I.V. fluids. Contact veterinarian, or:

- a) Tube calf with 2 litres of electrolytes twice daily until manure begins to firm or calf is no longer depressed.
- b) Give a broad spectrum intramuscular antibiotic once a day for 3 consecutive days.
- c) Feed 1.5 litres of whole milk twice daily if calf doesn't suck.
- d) If more than 3 days of therapy are required, contact veterinarian

Note: When feeding or tubing the electrolytes (like Revibe or Lifeguard) do not feed milk at the same time. Stagger the feedings.

5. If calves appear wobbly:

Commonly western Canadian calves don't develop viral diarrhea. Many of these calves don't dehydrate or do so slowly. Instead their electrolyte absorption is compromised and the main clinical feature is the "drunken sailor" demeanor.

- a) Some of these calves are not dehydrated, but are weak and unable to get up.
- b) The manure from the calves may not be fluid. It may be copious and frothy with mucous present.
- c) These calves are acidotic and need oral fluids with bicarbonate or may even need I.V. fluids containing bicarbonate (an alkalizing agent).



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FACS represents the livestock industry in advancing responsible animal care and handling practices in agriculture.

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