

Scours: AKA Deadly Diarrhea



Scours, or diarrhea, is the most common cause of death in newborn calves, lambs and goats. Diarrhea causes the newborn to quickly dehydrate with electrolyte imbalances. Death can occur in as little as 12 hours. Bacteria (*E coli*, *Salmonella*, *Clostridium*), viruses (*Rotavirus*, *Coronavirus*) and protozoa (*Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*) are the most common causes.

Calves fed large amounts of milk or inappropriately formulated milk replacers are also at risk for developing diarrhea. Transmission of scours is most commonly fecal-oral. Accumulation of manure on udders along with dirty and wet environments make calves more prone to this deadly condition.

When it comes to neonatal diarrhea, a good offence focused on prevention is the best defence. Scours prevention should include having a segregated calving area. Cows and calves need adequate shelter and bedding to keep them as clean and dry as possible. There are very effective vaccines that can be given to pregnant cows allowing the cow to pass immunity to her calf in colostrum. Veterinarians can advise on protocols for the vaccine most appropriate for your operation.

It is also important producers understand scours can be spread mechanically. To avoid transmitting disease between calves, wash your hands and wear clean outer clothing. This could also prevent the transmission of the scours to yourself or your family.

Colostrum is an essential component to calf health. Ideally, the cow should produce enough quality colostrum for her calf to receive at least 3 litres in the first 12 hours of life. However, heifers, older cows and cows in poor body condition may not produce colostrum in enough quantity or quality to get the calf off to a good start. If in doubt, feeding a high quality colostrum replacer to the calf as soon as possible after birth (ideally in the first 12 hours of life). Studies show that calves that receive ample good quality colostrum not only get scours less frequently, but will remain healthier right through to weaning. Ask your veterinarian for advice on proper colostrum management and appropriate products to use.

Working proactively with your veterinarian to develop plans to maintain a productive and efficient herd health program will produce more pounds of weaned calf and more cows bred in a timely manner. Good health is the key to profitable agri-business. Maintaining a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) allows your veterinarian to make effective recommendations to assist you to reach your goal of an efficient, profitable herd of cattle.

