

Preventing Calf Scours

Management can help tackle infectious and non-infectious causes.

Calf scours is commonly due to disease caused by a viral pathogen (infectious cause) but it also can stem from disease caused by bacterial infection or non-infectious causes such as inadequate nutrition. In all cases, associated diarrhea can cause dehydration and can set back a calf's future productivity.

An ounce of prevention

Effective management and proactive intervention can help prevent and control the challenge. Consider these tips:

1. Prepare for a successful calving season.

A smooth calving season isn't possible without preparation. Make sure you have calving season essentials before the first calf is born. Refer to the Calving Essentials Checklist.

2. Avoid mixing calves of different ages.

Eliminate the age gap and the potential for older calves to shed pathogens to younger calves by shortening the calving window. Or, consider implementing a calving system that keeps different ages separate, like the Sand Hills Calving System.

Calving Essentials Checklist

Now is the time to plan for calving. Make sure you have a reliable team, including a trusted veterinarian, on speed-dial. Prepare a dedicated calving area with ample space that's clean, dry and protected from the elements. And, stock up on these calving season essentials.

- 1. Non-irritant antiseptic and extra bedding:** Protect newborn calves during calving season from disease-causing pathogens with a clean, dry environment.
- 2. Clean towels:** Calving season can be a messy business, be ready to clean it up.
- 3. Iodine, vaccinations and antibiotics:** Work with your vet to create or refine a spring calving or fall calving protocol for your operation.
- 4. Obstetrical chains, two handles and mechanical calf pullers:** Keep these supplies on hand in case you need to pull a calf.
- 5. A clean surface for used equipment:** Avoid having to pick up tools or equipment from soiled bedding.
- 6. Disposable obstetrical sleeves:** Use a new pair every time.
- 7. Lubricant:** Nothing fancy required. Get the job done with non-detergent soap and warm water.
- 8. A calving book for record keeping:** There's no such thing as too many records, be ready on day one.
- 9. Ear tags and a tagger:** Add a spare tagger for good measure.
- 10. A sled with ropes and a heater:** Protect calves from the elements during extra cold winter weather.
- 11. Colostrum replacer, electrolytes and an esophageal feeder:** Ensure calves get the nutrition they need if the weather is especially harsh, or if they can't nurse their dam.
- 12. Extra coveralls and boots:** Keep extra hats and gloves handy in case there is unexpected cold weather. **HW**

3. Provide high quality nutrition that meets both cow and calf needs.

It's important to maintain proper nutrition through the third trimester and into calving season so the cow can provide for and properly nurse her calf. High-quality, year-round nutrition also prepares her to rebreed quickly.

Make sure calves are up on their feet soon after birth to nurse and consume colostrum. Adequate colostrum provides calves with necessary antibodies and provides immunity against pathogens¹. If you doubt that a calf has nursed and consumed enough colostrum, provide an alternative source, like colostrum replacer, as an insurance policy.

4. Observe calves daily.

Evaluate each calf and look for signs of dehydration or calf scours. Symptoms include:

- Inactivity, lethargy and weakness
- Droopy ears
- Sunken eyes
- Watery diarrhea and fecal staining

5. Have a treatment plan in place before calving season.

Even the best management programs can fail. Unpredictable weather and new pathogens can throw your calves off course. Use your local veterinarian to form a treatment plan specific to your operation.

Don't be caught off guard by calf scours during calving season. A proactive plan will help you minimize calf scours and dehydration. **HW**

Editor's Note: This article was provided by Purina Animal Nutrition.



Scours can be costly for cow-calf producers, but some simple management tactics can help keep calves healthy.

¹Retrieved from: Great Plains Beef Cattle Handbook by Gene White, D.V.M. University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Kurt Wohlgemuth, D.V.M., North Dakota State University-Fargo.