



Common CalfhooD Diseases: Recognizing Scours

CalfhooD Diarrhea is the most common health problem affecting young cattle and milk-fed animals. Calves are particularly susceptible during their second week of life. Up to 40% of calf deaths in the first six weeks of life are scour related. It is important that we know how to identify them before we begin to apply treatment options.

1. Causes of calf scours

Scours can be classified into two types: nutritional and infectious. Nutritional scours is usually caused by stress due to a breakdown in management routine. Nutritional scour often progresses to

become an infectious scour, which is caused by a high population of pathogens. Several infectious agents can cause scour in calves and often more than one of them is involved:

	Cause of calf scour	Age at which clinical signs most commonly appear
Parasites	<i>Cryptosporidia</i>	First week of life
	<i>Coccidia</i>	3-6 weeks of life
Viruses	<i>Rotavirus</i>	1-3 weeks of age
	<i>Coronavirus</i>	1-3 weeks of age
Bacteria	<i>Salmonella</i>	2-6 weeks of age
	<i>E. coli</i>	Calves <5 days of age

2. Symptoms of scours:

Calf scours is easily recognized, with calf feces increasing in frequency and quantity, and having a higher-than-normal water content. Whatever the cause, farmers will see some or all of the following:

- Bright yellow or white feces.
- Depressed calves who are reluctant to feed.
- Calves with sunken eyes and/or a temperature.
- Skin remaining peaked or tented when lifted, indicating dehydration.
- Weight loss and weakness.
- In severe cases, calves will collapse, become comatose and die.

With careful observation, it is possible for calf raisers to anticipate the onset of scour the day before it occurs by looking out for the following signs:

- Dry muzzle, thick mucus appearing from the nostrils.
- Very firm feces.
- Refusal of milk.
- A tendency to lie down.
- A high body temperature (over 102.5°F).

Estimation of hydration status in calves with diarrhea

Source: Smith, 2009. *Vet. Clin. North Am. Food Anim. Pract.* 25: 55-72.

Dehydration	Attitude	Eyebally recession	Skin tent (seconds)
< 5%	Normal	None	<1
6-8% (mild)	Slightly depressed	2-4 mm	1-2
8-10% (moderate)	depressed	4-6 mm	2-5
10-12% (severe)	Comatose	6-8 mm	6-10
> 12%	Comatose/dead	8-12 mm	>10

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Ask the Expert

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