



Preventing Calf Scours

Vaccination offers one mode to prevent calf scours.

November 11, 2009

Calf scours and other complications in newborn calves lead to dehydration. Small farmers who have calves with scours can find the condition tricky to manage, as it not only leads to dehydration and possibly death of their animals, but also leaves few clues as to the cause.

Calf scours can be caused by a range of bacterial, viral and protozoal agents and is most likely to occur in the first weeks after birth, according to John Gay, DVM, of Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. Typically, symptoms of scours are treated with high-energy electrolyte solutions that contain glycine, he said.

However, steps can be taken before birth to prevent and better manage calf scours within the herd, said Jerry Olson, DVM, of Pfizer Animal Clinic.

"Infected animals very quickly have problems with nutrient malabsorption, excess secretion of fluids and intestinal inflammation," Olson said. "Once these factors start to snowball, their combined effect is difficult to overcome."

Pfizer Animal Health offers the ScourGuard 4KC vaccination that protects against two pathogens that lead to scours—the rotavirus serotypes G6 and G10—and helps prevent diarrhea caused by coronavirus, E. coli K99 and Clostridium perfringens type C.

Vaccinations should be administered to the cow starting about six to eight weeks before birth. A booster should then be given three weeks before calving, when high levels of antibodies are present in the cow's blood. Heifers should receive two doses of the vaccination, given about two weeks apart.

"Timing of the vaccination is important," said Benjamin Church, a Pfizer spokesperson. "From the time you administer the vaccine until the immune system peaks in producing antibody to the agents in the vaccine is about three weeks in animals that have been previously vaccinated."

Farmers should consult a veterinarian if interested in the vaccine, Church advised. Cows being treated with other Gram-negative vaccines for scours or pinkeye are at risk for Gram-negative stacking, which could lead to abortion.

For farmers wary of vaccinations or who simply cannot afford it, Gay gave other tips for preventing calf scours:

1. Don't buy calves from sales yards
2. Provide a clean are for cows to calve
3. Give newborn calves sufficient amounts of high-quality, cleanly handled colostrum
4. Follow up the colostrum with clean whole milk or a high-quality substitute