



Prime Health Vets

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Newsletter



**GIVING YOUR CALVES
A GREAT START**

Giving your calves a great start

It's that time of the year again where the number of jobs far exceeds the hours in the day. It is important to have a clear and definite plan to make sure that all calves born are protected from the common bacteria and viruses that kill up to 10% of calves. A little effort in this area can reduce your workload dramatically.

Lets go through the basics quickly

- *have you cleaned and disinfected you calving pens and calf house?*
- *have you got iodine or an alternative disinfectant to dip navels?*
- *have you got hot water to clean and disinfect buckets and make milk replacer?*

Are you aware of all the problems that occurred last year -maybe towards the end of the calving season? Did a lot of calves get diarrhoea or pneumonia? Did you consult your vet to find out the cause?

It may be possible to prevent the same happening this year as a simple vaccine at the right time may reduce or completely stop such reoccurrence.

By having a chat with your vet a clear Health Plan can be drawn up which will help. Even if no lab samples were taken last year preventative plans can still be put into place.

Colostrum

This is the very first line of defence. Get it wrong and no matter what you do your calves will always be coming from behind. Calves should get on average 3 litres in the first two hours after birth, after that the amount of protection from colostrum is tiny. If you are unsure that you are giving enough colostrum, we can confirm with a blood sample. It is estimated that up to 40% of newborn calves do not get enough colostrum.

Stomach tubing is a useful skill but many farmers are unsure or afraid of doing it. Please ask us and we will show you how to do it properly. If anybody is in the Johnes program I would advise that they discuss this area with their vet.

Pneumonia

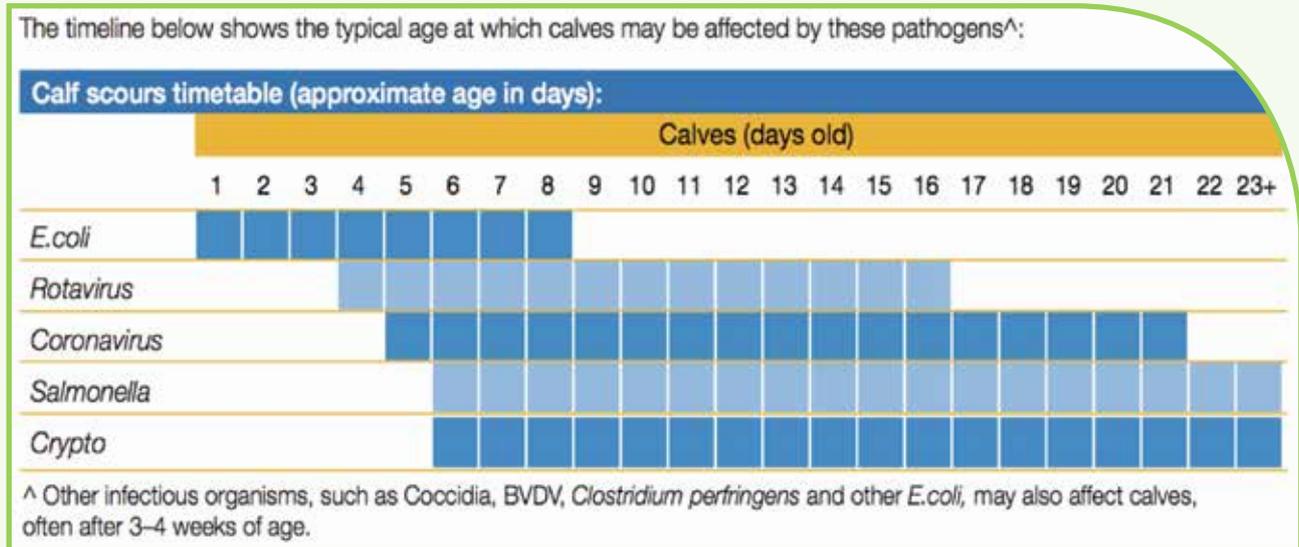
This is very common in some herds and it is a multifactorial problem. It can be caused by a bacterial, viral or environmental problem.

The main viruses seen are Bovine respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), PI3, IBR and Coronavirus. If any of these have been diagnosed in your herd then a vaccination program at a very small cost can be put in place to limit their effect.

The main bacteria involved are *Manheimia haemolytica* and *Pasteurella multocida* .

Environmental issues such as poor bedding, overcrowding, poor ventilation, or contact with groups of animals of different ages put calves under stress, making them more vulnerable to scours and pneumonia. It is also important to note that if you are buying in calves that they are kept isolated from your calves as their disease status is not known and the stress of movement would make them a little more prone to pneumonia. The expense and labour involved in an outbreak of pneumonia in young animals is easy to measure but the stunting effect and the inability to reach their full potential should be more of a concern, especially in dairy heifers.

Scour



This is caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. It causes damage to the lining of the gut and can be very debilitating or even cause death, calves that have scour may take a long time to recover and sometimes long lasting effects are observed. The two most common viruses are **Rotavirus and Coronavirus**.

If these have been diagnosed on your farm then a vaccination program against them is probably already in place, if you suspect that you have a problem with these then you need to speak with your vet before the calving season begins as sometimes these vaccines can be in short supply. Generally these vaccines need to be given to the cows at a reasonable period before calving.

Salmonella and E coli are some of bacteria involved and there are good vaccines available for both. E coli is usually seen in calves less than 5 days and good hygiene is important, and making sure that calf beds are cleaned regularly.

Cryptosporidium is present on many farms and while there is no vaccine there is a preventative treatment available, which must be given over several days. This, however, must always be used in conjunction with good hygiene

Coccidia is a parasite that infects the gut and causes, at a minimum, decreased weight gain and at its worst severe straining and blood in the feces or death. Birds have been commonly associated with the transfer between animals but this is not generally the case as it appears to be endemic in herds. There are some very good treatments and preventatives available, which can give up to 6 weeks cover.

All scour can lead to severe disease in calves and the sign to look for are weak calves, off milk, sunken eyes or collapse. If any calf gets scour it is now recommended not to take them off milk. It is best to introduce an extra feed of electrolyte between feeds of milk. However if the calf begins to get weak it would be best to get veterinary help.

These are the most common causes of calf problems and hopefully this will jog your memory of last year. Most of these can be prevented and give your calves the best possible start to their lives. I would advise that it is always best to have a chat with us about the best plan for **your** farm as all farms are different. We have an excellent knowledge of the herd problems on your farm and can draw up a plan that will work on your farm and be easy for you to carry out.

It is easier for everybody to address any problems early as we can do more for you to prevent these problems.

Article by Denis Mackessy, Newmarket.

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