December 2025 Newsletter

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Penbode Farm Vets

Since 1840

Calf Scour

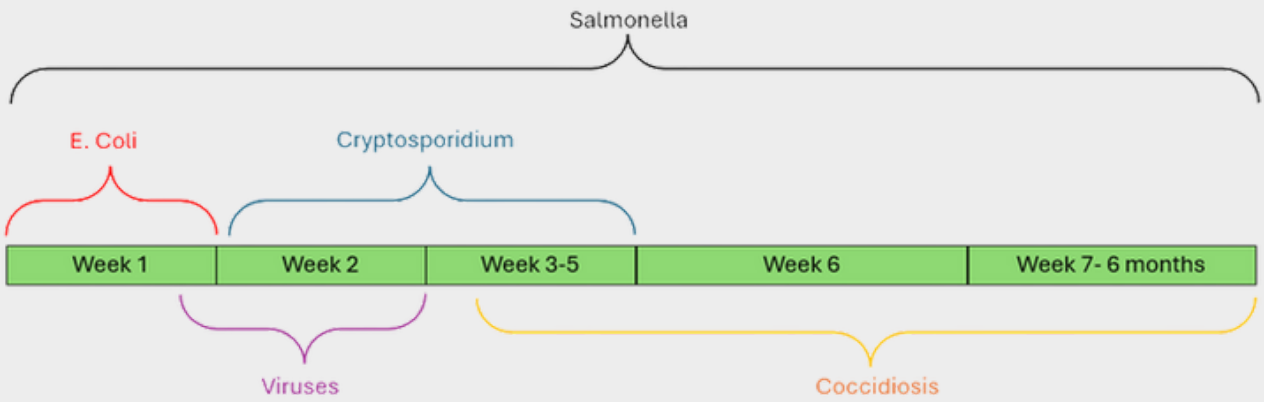
By Lewis Wosnitzka MRCVS

What is Calf Scour and Why is it Important?

Calf scour is one of the most common issues that we see calves face in the first year of life. While calf scour has very obvious clinical signs; their severity, causes and appearance can vary wildly.

Because of this it is important to know the exact cause of the calf's scour so that we can effectively treat. Effective is the key word here as, while their clinical signs are similar, the most common causes and the largest proportion of scour cases are completely unaffected by antibiotics. It is important to treat effectively and treat as soon as possible as gut damage during early life impairs feed conversion, reduces daily weight gain, extends the rearing and weaning periods and studies suggest it can affect their lifelong productivity and fertility (https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022030210007009) while also leading to death in a lot of cases.

Causes:



Cryptosporidium

The most common cause of scour in calves. Most often from a week old and up to 6 weeks of age. It is a protozoa meaning that it is unaffected by antibiotic treatment and their eggs or Oocysts as their scientifically known are hard to eliminate from the environment. It is important to note it is zoonotic which means its easily and regularly transferable to humans.

Coccidia

The second most common cause of scour in calves. Affects calves over 3 weeks up to 6 months or even a year. Another protozoa that is unaffected by antibiotic usage. Often found when housed due to build up in the environment over several batches of calves.

Viruses

There are multiple viruses that are responsible for calf diarrhoea. These include coronavirus and rotavirus. As with all viruses there are no specific treatments for any viruses and vaccinations are the best route to avoid issues. Viruses often affect between 1 and 2 weeks of age and cause severe scour.

E. Coli

E.coli is the only cause of primary scour that is bacterial in origin so can be treated with antibiotics. It is likely the cause of any scour in calves under 1 week of age as they are vulnerable in this period. The scour may appear white in colour.

Salmonella

An Important bacteria of the gastrointestinal tract that causes severe bloody scour and a very high temperature. It is another zoonotic bacteria and can be serious if contracted by humans so it is important to know if its on your farm. It can affect calves of any age group.

Worms

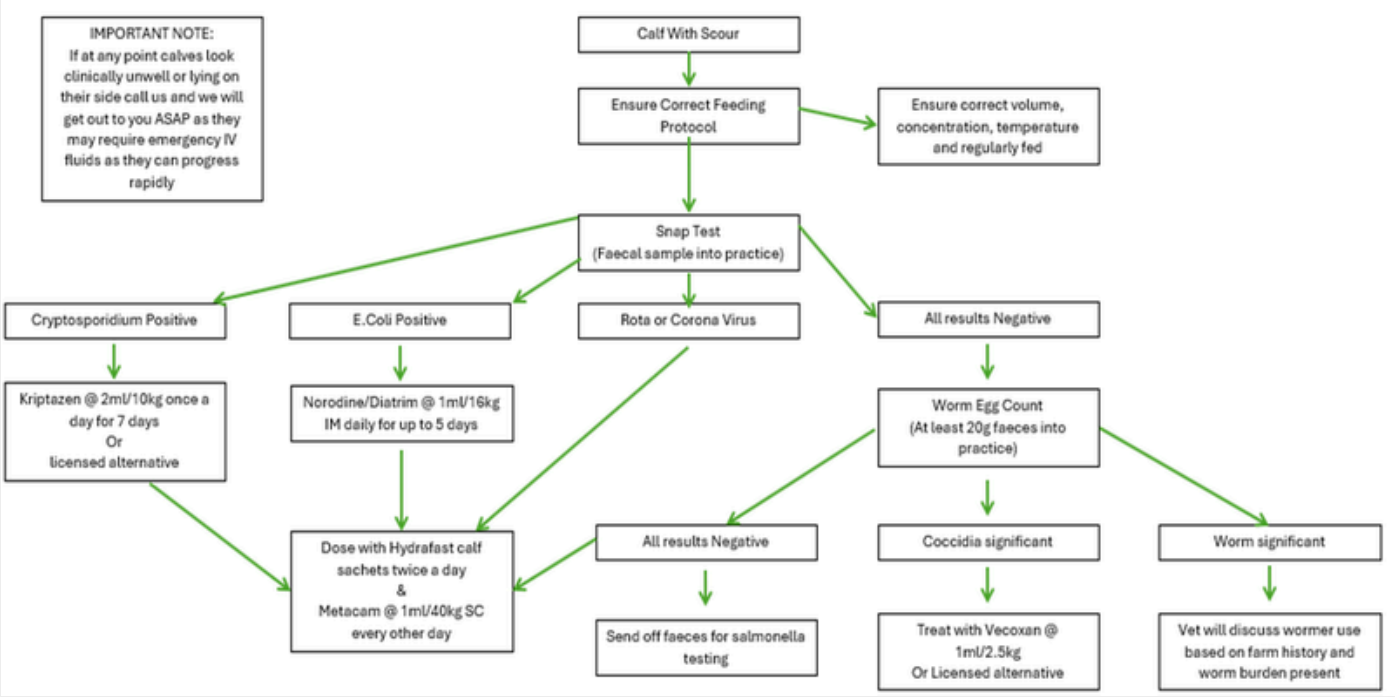
There are too large a variety of worms that cause scour to talk about in this article but they are often an issue in older calves that are out to grass. The scour is often less severe and weight loss or poor growth may be noticed before clinical signs.

Nutritional scour

Caused by milk or milk replacer due to: incorrect amounts, incorrect temperatures, incorrect dilution, irregular feeding patterns or in poorly cleaned troughs. Easily fixed by ensuring feeding Is done correctly.

Diagnosis

Below is a flow chart the helps to explain the steps we go through to diagnose and therefore correctly treat calf scour but please note you should always call your vet for advice or a visit if you are concerned. While some clinical signs like bloody diarrhoea are more commonly seen in salmonella it is often impossible to tell what the cause of scour is just from the look or smell.



Treatment and prevention

The best treatment, as with all ailments, is to avoid the problem in the first place. While this can be achieved with great colostrum management, hygiene and low stocking densities, this isn't always easy on farm. We stock a range of vaccines that help prevent outbreaks of calf scour caused by E.coli, Rotavirus, Coronavirus and Crytpo as well as preventative treatments for coccidia; call in and speak to one of our vets to discuss vaccine options for your farm. As mentioned before in this article the most important thing about treating calf scour is correctly identifying the inciting cause as while the clinical signs overlap the treatments for most causes do not.

Viruses have no specific treatment and are unaffected by antibiotics. The best plan for these cases once diagnosed is IV fluids by one of our vets if they are recumbent or oral fluids with electrolyte powder if able to stand and swallow without assistance. They can also be given Metacam once hydrated.

Cryptosporidium and coccidiosis are both protozoa that are unaffected by antibiotics and will only resolve with their own respective drug treatments; Kriptazen and Vecoxan (other brand names are available for treatment so speak to your vet about which ones are effective and licensed). Speak to one of our vets about the possibility of an in-feed prescription for coccidiosis treatment and prevention.

Worms, when they are causing a clinical issue, are treated with a range of wormers that vary in application, effectiveness and uses so its not worth opening that can of worms here! As always, discuss with your vet to decide whether you need treatment and what to use following a worm egg count on our Ovacyte machine that can have results back to you within half an hour (depending on practice work load), this can be done regularly as a routine to prevent worm burdens being an issue.

Salmonella and bacteria like E.coli are the only antibiotic responsive, primary causes of scour in calves. They are both gram negative bacteria which are not affected by a lot of antibiotics that are regularly stocked by vets practices. Speak to one of our vets if you suspect you have a bacterial cause of scour.

All causes of Calf scour will benefit from continued hydration, electrolytes, NSAIDs like Metacam and a clean environment with low stocking density. If you have any concerns about any of your animals don't hesitate to call for a visit or over the phone advice as calves deteriorate quickly.

Andy is back on British soil after his trip ‘down under’

Andy is back on British soil after his trip ‘down under’ where he competed for GB in his age group at the World Triathlon Championships in Wollongong, New South Wales.

He did really well, placing **18th** out of 85 in his age group and 4th Brit.

“It was an amazing experience. The Aussies certainly know how to put on a great race; the course, the weather, the atmosphere and crowds were incredible and I’m really happy with my result”.

Congratulations Andy!

Mastitis in Ewes

By Jemma Young BVM BVS MRCVS

Mastitis is a commonly discussed and major focus in cattle farming, should we be putting the same level of focus to Mastitis in sheep? The simple answer is yes, but what is mastitis? Mastitis is the inflammation of the udder, and is one of the most significant health challenges in sheep systems. While it can occur in any flock, early awareness and good management can dramatically reduce its impact.

Most flocks will experience cases of mastitis in ewes each year, with the annual incidence being up to 15%. Mastitis negatively impacts animal welfare as well as ewe mortality and increased culling rates. Mastitis also compromises lamb growth rates and contributes to increased lamb mortality, due to a lack of good quality milk and competition over milk from the remaining healthy teat.

Causes and Clinical Signs:

Mastitis is usually caused by bacterial infection of the udder, most commonly Staphylococcus aureus. E.coli is also common and is seen in severe cases as gangrenous mastitis/black udder. Occasionally mastitis can be caused by viral infection. The pathogen enters the teat end after lambs have sucked, through physical trauma to the teat, by excessive sucking or poorly positioned teats that are more susceptible to damage.

Symptoms to look out for:

·Heat and swelling of the udder. Alternatively, the udder can be cold and hard
·Pain which causes the ewe to become lame in the hind limb/s
·Black colour change to the udder
·Milk changes – Watery +/- Clots +/- Blood
·Sick ewe – Reluctant to eat or separated from the flock
·Hungry/empty lambs
·Chronic cases – Palpable masses in the udder
Indirect indicators of disease if no clinical signs seen:
·Decrease milk quality
·Poor or lower than expected growth rates in lambs

Risk Factors:

There are many reasons ewes may be predisposed to mastitis:

- Nutrition – ewes with too low energy and protein content in their diet will struggle to provide enough milk to feed growing lambs. Hungry lambs are more likely to cause trauma to the ewe's teats due to forceful suckling. Ewes on a low plane of nutrition will also struggle to mount an adequate immune response if intramammary infection occurs.

- Hygiene – Good hygiene reduces the risk and spread of all infectious disease. Wet and dirty bedding is the perfect breeding ground for bacteria to multiply, ewes lying in these conditions are far more likely to be affected by mastitis.

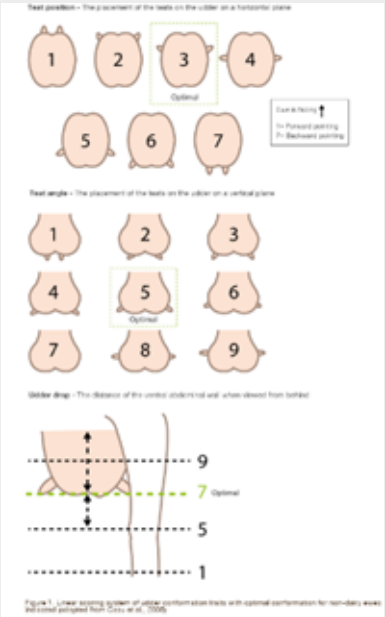


Image from: https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/understanding-mastitis-in-sheep

- Udder conformation – Poor teat positon angle and udder drop have all been linked to increased risk for mastitis. Teats facing down and forwards are at a higher risk of mastitis, whereas teats at a 45 ◦ angle to the udder are less likely to sustain injury, protected from the weather and environment and as a result, less likely to contract mastitis.

- There are also many other risk factors for mastitis, including cross-suckling of lambs from infected mothers, ewes over 4 years old, lambing indoors, increased stocking density and increased risk of contaminated bedding.

Treatment:

Injectable antibiotics and NSAIDs should be given as soon as reasonably possible.

- Many antibiotics are effective against the mastitis pathogens, so give your vet a call to discuss which will be the most useful on your farm.

- Metacam provides pain relief, and has good anti toxic effects for ewes experiencing toxic mastitis – Metacam makes ewes feel well enough to eat, preventing further milk drop and significant loss of ewe condition. REMEMBER Metacam is off licence in sheep, so appropriate withdrawals should be adhered to.

Mastitis can kill ewes, especially in cases of rapid onset of toxic mastitis/black udder.

If ewes recover, they often lose the affected gland, and can still spread infectious material after the mastitis has apparently cleared up.
Ewes that have had a case of mastitis are good candidates for the cull list. They are unlikely to regain full function in the affected gland and will be unable to adequately support any future lambs. Chronically affected ewes also spread mastitis pathogens, so by culling these ewes, we are able to minimise further spread.

Prevention:

Managing your on-farm risk factors is the best way of reducing the chance of ewes contracting mastitis.

Risk factor management options include:

- Cull ewes with poor udder conformation.

- Isolate ewes with mastitis and manage as a separate group to reduce mastitis pathogen transmission to healthy ewes.

- Manage nutrition based on number of lambs, extra nutrition for ewes with multiples.

- Good hygiene/ biosecurity procedures to prevent ewe to ewe spread.

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway funding can be used to discuss risk factors on your farm and put in place management protocols to reduce the impact of Mastitis on your flock.
Please speak to your vet about signing up to the AHWP and how we can help manage mastitis on your farm.

MilkSure Course

Thursday 29th January 2026
11:30am – 2pm

Is your MilkSure (Part 1) training due?

Why should you take this course?

Farmers will benefit by:

✓ having fewer costly milk residue failures
✓ using medicines more effectively and therefore more efficiently
✓ fulfilling Red Tractor antibiotic regulations
✓ demonstrating to customers a clear commitment to producing pure, safe milk.

After this course you and your staff will:

✓ feel more in control of safeguarding your milk production
✓ know the three main areas which are risky and you will have the necessary tools to avoid residue failures
✓ have fewer decisions to make
✓ have less doubt and better peace of mind.

Location – London Inn, Kilkhampton

Call your branch or email jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk to book your seats (please let us know of any dietary requirements)

Upcoming Courses

Mastering Meds Course

with Matilda Herridge-Nowell

Thursday 11th December 10am At the Penbode Market Hut, Kivells Market, Holsworthy
Contact your branch to book your space or email jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk
Red Tractor approved

Lambing Course

Monday 2nd February 10am – 3pm, at Holsworthy practice. £85pp includes lunch.

Young Persons Lambing Course

Tuesday 17th February 5:30pm – 7pm, at Holsworthy practice. £25pp

Call your branch or email jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk to book your seats
(please let us know of any dietary requirements)

Christmas
Opening Times

Wednesday 24th December: Closing at 4pm

Thursday 25th December: (Christmas Day)
Emergencies only

Friday 26th December: (Boxing Day)
Emergencies only

Saturday 27th December: Open as normal

Sunday 28th December: Emergencies only

Monday 29th December: Open as normal

Tuesday 30th December: Open as normal

Wednesday 31st December: Closing at 4pm

Thursday 1st January: Emergencies only

Friday 2nd January: Open as normal

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