As we discussed last week, colostrum intake and number of organisms the calf is exposed to greatly influence calf immunity. If immunity is low, the calf may contract an illness. This week we will discuss treatment for newborn calf illness.

The most prevalent and deadly illness that occurs in the first month of a calf's life is scours. There are four main causes of scours: E.coli (bacterial), Cryptosporidia (protozoal), and Rotavirus and Coronavirus (viral). Scours caused by E.coli will typically occur within the first three days of life. A calf affected by Cryptosporidium will have scours at about a week old. Rotavirus and Coronavirus will occur within the first three weeks of the calf's life. Knowing the cause of scours, whether it be bacterial, viral, or protozoal, will aide in deciding the appropriate type of treatment for the calf. The best method of preventing E.coli, Coronavirus, and Rotavirus from occurring is to vaccinate the cows before calving. This will help build calf immunity through colostrum intake. Cryptosporidium, cannot be prevented by vaccination. This illness is caused by unsanitary and crowded calving areas. Proper management should take place to keep the cows in clean, uncrowded calving areas to ensure cryptosporidium does not affect your herd.

Because dehydration is a main result of scours, it is important to determine what stage of dehydration the calf is in so that a proper course of treatment may be initiated. Though any stage of dehydration is serious and should receive attention, some stages are more critical than others. In the least critical stage the calf will have scours, but will still be able to stand and walk around and nurse. Calves in this stage of dehydration should be treated with antibiotics and oral electrolytes. The most serious symptoms of dehydration may include sunk in eyes, inability to stand, and even unconsciousness. Calves with these symptoms should be immediately treated with IV fluids.

The course that scours take can be rapid and fatal. This is why it is important to quickly and efficiently treat affected calves before dehydration sets in and worsens. For more information concerning the treatment of newborn calf illness, please contact us.