

A STORY OF A STEAK

RESPONSIBLE BEEF

CALF HEALTH: SCOURS PREVENTION

Calving season will be here in a few short months, so now is a good time to start planning your calving season protocols. Kevin Hill, D.V.M., with Merck Animal Health, says a major area of focus during calving season is always scours prevention. "Scours is the leading cause of death in calves younger than 30 days old. Working with your veterinarian, establish a plan for cow and heifer pre-calving management, as well as newborn calf health to help decrease the losses due to scours in the spring."

COW AND HEIFER PRE-CALVING MANAGEMENT

Now is a good time to get a calendar out and plan a vaccination schedule for pregnant females. Dr. Hill says it's important to establish a vaccine schedule that allows adequate time for colostrum antibodies to develop. "It may take up to two weeks for cows to respond to vaccinations, and since the transfer of antibodies to colostrum begins about five weeks before calving, producers should plan their vaccination schedule with these critical times in mind and plan accordingly." In most situations, heifers will need two doses of a vaccine and cows will need a single dose, therefore producers will likely want to schedule the first dose for heifers at about 12 weeks prior to calving, and the second dose four to six weeks later.

Dr. Hill says cows and heifers should be vaccinated against neonatal scours such as rotavirus, coronavirus, *E. coli* and *Clostridium perfringens*. "Using a vaccine, such as Guardian®, will help ensure that high levels of maternal antibodies are produced by the dam and are then available to the calves for protection against scours." Guardian is one of the most current and complete vaccines for the prevention of calf scours.

For vaccines to work the way they are designed to work, the cattle must be nutritionally sound. "The immune response is a complex chain of events that requires the proper balance of energy, protein, minerals and vitamins in a cow's diet. We cannot expect vaccines to perform well with any level of nutritional deficiency," says Dr. Hill. "The three months prior to calving are critical in terms of meeting increasing nutritional needs. Other circumstances, such as the quality of feeds available, can result in a nutritional deficiency, so supplements can help fill in the gaps in these situations. It's important for producers to consult with their veterinarian or nutritionist to make sure cows are getting adequate nutrition during this crucial time."

As producers prepare cows and heifers to calve, consideration also needs to be given to a location for calving. "Give the calving area some thought several months prior to calving to determine the best ground for calving. The calving area should not be the same location where you've been feeding all winter. Also make sure that calves will be in a clean environment, protected from adverse weather, and separated from older calves," says Dr. Hill.

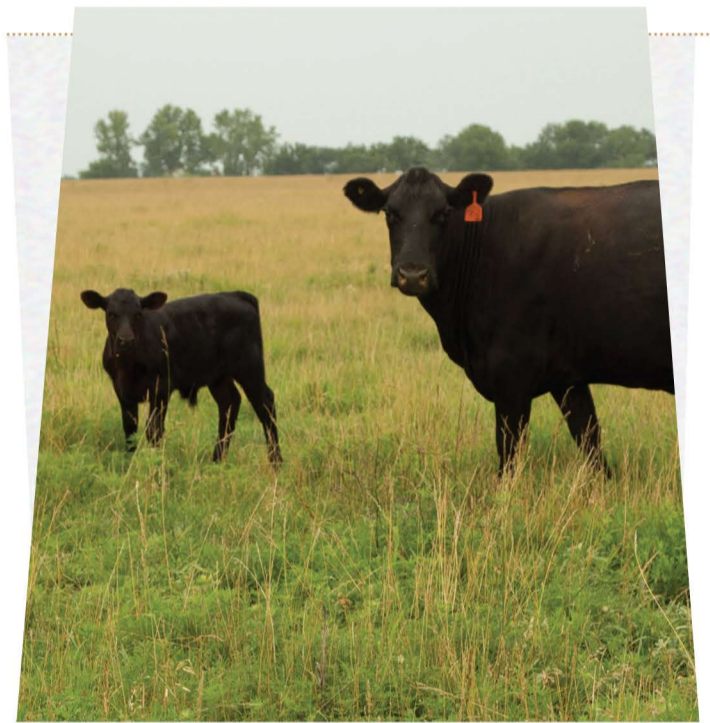
NEWBORN CALF HEALTH

Once a calf is born, colostrum intake is crucial. "None of our pre-calving management steps will do much good if the calf doesn't get colostrum," says Dr. Hill. "Calves need to get up and nurse within three to four hours after birth. Don't wait until 12 hours to intervene." Several circumstances, such as difficulty calving or poor udder conformation, can prevent a calf from nursing and getting colostrum. In these types of situations, Dr. Hill recommends milking the cow and tubing the calf to guarantee that the calf gets adequate colostrum.

Optimizing prevention is key when it comes to the health of newborn calves. Dr. Hill says that a new vaccine, Bovilis® Coronavirus, is available to provide active immunity in neonates. "This is a new tool for producers to use for protection against the enteric symptoms of bovine coronavirus. It's not affected by

colostrum, allowing you to give it anytime around colostrum intake," he says. "Bovine coronavirus is far more prevalent than producers realize, and active immunization is important in the prevention of scours." Bovilis Coronavirus is a modified-live intranasal vaccine and is safe for use in young calves.

The final critical component for successful calving is good general hygiene of the calving area. "Make sure to keep the maternity pens clean, use iodine dips for navels and clean cows teats prior to nursing when needed," says Dr. Hill. "These important steps can have a tremendous positive effect on calf health during the calving season."



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-- DR. HILL



While no health protocols are 100 percent effective, having a well thought plan in place can greatly increase a producer's chances of having a successful calving season.

As always, it's essential to involve and work with your veterinarian regarding any animal health protocols.



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