



MOOSE JAW ANIMAL CLINIC

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Biosecurity and the Modern Cow-Calf Operation

Progress and change have made veterinary medicine in large animal practice move more towards preventative medicine versus individual animal medicine. The modern producer of food is also evolving, becoming not only a livestock owner and feeder but a manager of a complex farm business. Keeping stock healthy and alive is the ultimate goal. How that is achieved is the project of both veterinarian and producer.

The term “biosecurity” refers to management practices that will avoid the entry of and limit the spread of disease within a large group—most often referred to as an intensive livestock operation. It is a term most often used in the raising of chickens and hogs. However, we see changes in cattle populations where it is now becoming more common to have herds of 250 cows or more. The risks of disease outbreaks increase with larger herd population size.

Assessing risk is a job for everyone. In terms of treating scour calves, it can be a high risk situation to treat a scouring calf in the environment of the veterinary clinic and then take that calf home. This can serve as a possible avenue of introduction of new bacteria/viruses. Therefore, whenever possible, scouring calves should be treated at home. We suggest an exam and IV catheterization of the dehydrated calf, which is then taken home to a warm isolated area and maintained on IV fluids. Your veterinarian can help set up a treatment plan and guide you along in treatment of these calves. If you are not equipped to do this at home, we will continue to offer hospitalization service.

Prevention and environmental manipulation are still the foundations of managing a scour outbreak in your herd. Things that you can do to avoid running into a problem:

- ✓ *Scour vaccination of cows prior to calving*
- ✓ *Vaccination of calves at birth for viral/bacterial scours*
- ✓ *Avoid overcrowding—“dilution is the solution to pollution”*
- ✓ *Don't calve the cows on the wintering grounds*
- ✓ *Keep cows and heifers in good body condition—thin animals have reduced quality and quantity of colostrum*
- ✓ *Ensure that calves get colostrum (2 L within the first 6 hours of life)*
- ✓ *Calves with diarrhea should be immediately isolated from the healthy calves*
- ✓ *Calves that are being treated for diarrhea (tubed, etc) should not be handled at the same time as processing healthy newborn calves.*
- ✓ *Keep 2 stomach tube bags—one for giving newborn calves colostrum and one for feeding scouring calves electrolytes*

If scours become a serious problem, a herd visit by your veterinarian is suggested to identify the cause and to suggest management changes that would minimize spread of the disease.