



Calf Rearing Fact Sheet: Calf health

Post-weaning animal health plan

Key Points

1. Keep monitoring your calves after weaning.
2. Vaccinate calves and monitor parasites.
3. Know what the risks are in your area for facial eczema and copper deficiency.
4. Be proactive and act fast when issues arise.



General

- It is still important to monitor calves after weaning. The earlier health issues are detected, the less effect they will have on live weight gain.

Post-weaning diseases

- Internal parasites: Once calves have been on pasture for about 4 weeks they can become vulnerable to gastro-intestinal parasites. *Cooperia* is the main parasite at this age and causes scouring. The best treatment is a combination oral drench.
- Lice can appear from six weeks of age. Treatment usually involves a pour-on but consult your vet. Oral drenches do not contain an endectocide for lice.
- Pink eye: This is a highly contagious bacterial infection of the eye. The first sign is a discharge from the eye, the eye becomes reddened, an ulcer develops and finally the eyeball looks white. Most affected animals recover with treatment - see your Vet for remedies.
- Coccidiosis: This is caused by a protozoa (coccidian) and causes scouring and can result in rapid weight loss. It is generally seen in calves that have been taken off meal suddenly. Calves need to be put back on meal and weaned off gradually to allow for gradual exposure to the pathogen and for immunity to develop.
- Clostridial diseases: Prevention is the best option. Vaccinate with a 5 in 1 injection at 6-8 weeks of age and give a 2nd booster injection 4 –6 weeks later.
- Hair loss can occur for a number of reasons– ring worm, facial eczema or eczema. Ring worm is seen as small circles of lost hair. Facial eczema usually occurs in autumn and is caused by a fungal toxin on the grass causing liver damage and results in areas of hair loss/sunburn. Spring eczema is similar in appearance to facial eczema and appears to occur in calves with well developed rumens that are transitioning to high quality forage.
- Polio-encephalomalacia (polio, vitamin B1 or thiamine deficiency):- This is seen as a sudden onset of a nervous condition - initially showing up as blindness and/or lack of coordination. Animals can “fit” and die if left untreated. Cattle normally produce sufficient vitamin B1 and the reason why this process is disrupted in calves is unknown. The disease is most common in late spring or early summer after weaning. Early treatment with a vitamin B1 injection is needed.
- Ryegrass staggers:- Occurs in summer and is caused by a fungal toxin in perennial ryegrass. The symptoms are staggering and lack of coordination- similar to polio except that develops more slowly and more calves are affected. Symptoms tend to disappear when the calf is relaxed. It is not life threatening– move calves slowly, remove hazards like electric fences and move onto non ryegrass paddocks or feed hay or other supplements.
- Copper deficiencies:- In areas of deficiency calves often benefit from copper supplementation between 3 and 6 months of age. One symptom is a rough coat but confirmation should be through a blood test or liver biopsy