

Calf Diphtheria

Calf diphtheria is also known as oral necrobacillosis. This condition is a occurs sporadically in young cattle (usually less than 3 months of age). The condition occurs when bacteria (Gram negative anaerobes in particularly *Fusobacterium necrophorum*) that are normal inhabitants of the oral cavity gain access to the tissues of the oral cavity, pharynx and larynx through trauma.



The condition is often associated with poor hygiene, feeding fibrous feeds (causing damage to the mouth), wood shaving bedding, teeth eruption and vitamin A deficiency.

There are two presentations of Calf diphtheria.

1. Oral/ necrotic stomatitis form

The necrotic stomatitis form affects the cheeks, gums, palate, and tongue of the calf.

2. Laryngeal form or calf diphtheria

The laryngeal form affects the which affects the larynx and pharynx of the calf.

Initially the lesions in the oral cavity are dry, yellowish grey in colour, surrounded by a zone of red tissue and as the lesion progresses it sloughs, and granulation tissue is revealed. The calves often have cheek swelling, salivate and have foul breath. In advanced cases some calves become very sick, anorexic, have a temperature and have difficulty swallowing and chewing. If the condition progresses to involve the pharynx, a soft cough (moist and painful) may develop, followed by difficulty breathing and possibly pneumonia.

Diagnosis is often made based on the clinical signs and the typical oral lesions observed.

Treatment consists of early administration of antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. The affected calves should be isolated to prevent spread to other calves through contaminated feeding equipment.

Prevention is through improved housing and feeding equipment hygiene and ensure adequate colostrum intake.