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How to Diagnose the Cause of Scouring in Calves

When grossly looking at faeces, it is not possible to diagnose the exact cause of scours in calves.

There are several causes of scouring in calves, which include infections and non-infectious causes.

Infectious causes include:

- Rotavirus
- Coronavirus
- Escherichia coli (E. coli)
- Cryptosporidium parvum (Crypto)
- Clostridium perfringens
- Giardia
- Salmonella

Non-infectious scour is usually associated with a change in nutrition (for example a change from whole milk to a calf milk replacer or an increase in volume being fed).

There is a calf -side test, that involves sampling the faeces and running a test that takes approximately 15 minutes to provide a result. This test can diagnose the following common calf scour pathogens:

- Rotavirus
- Coronavirus
- Escherichia coli (E. coli)
- Cryptosporidium parvum (Crypto)
- Clostridium perfringens
- +/- Giardia



The calf side test is not capable of diagnosis Salmonella or Giardia. A faecal culture needs to be carried out and this is carried out in a laboratory setting.

Note: Salmonella is a common cause of scours in calves and often the scour contains blood.



Reference: Parkinson, T. J., Vermunt, J. J., & Malmo, J. (2019). Diseases of cattle in Australasia: a comprehensive textbook. New Zealand Veterinary Association Foundation for Continuing Education. Massey University Press, Auckland, 0745, New Zealand.