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Coccidiosis in Calves

Coccidiosis is a parasitic disease of young cattle (typically between 3-8months of age) which tends to occur in animals with a lowered immune system. These are cattle that are often stressed, have poor nutrition or concurrent disease.

We have been seeing a lot of coccidiosis this season, with environmental conditions favourable for the parasite's survival and proliferation, which has placed a heavy burden on already stressed animals.

Animals with clinical coccidiosis will present with some or all the following signs:

- Diarrhoea – often mucoid and contains blood
- Tenesmus (straining to defecate)
- Faecal staining
- Dehydration
- Inappetence
- Weakness
- Rough coat
- Weight loss

Animals with coccidiosis can shed oocysts in their poo, and so to diagnose the disease we can examine a poo sample in the clinic to look for the oocysts. Diagnosing off oocysts alone can be unrewarding in some cases, as a diseased animal can be shedding no oocysts if caught early, and the opposite true, a healthy animal can still shed oocysts. By combining our findings from examination of the animal and what we see under the microscope, we can recommend appropriate treatment and management options.

There are a few management techniques that can be utilised to reduce the risk of your animal's contracting coccidiosis, such as:

- Reducing stocking rates
- Weaning onto a 'clean' pasture
- Rotational grazing
- Feeding a calf pellet that contains a coccidiostat (e.g. Monensin)
- Dosing all calves with Toltrazuril (common trade names include Coxi-stop and Baycox) at weaning

A clean pasture is one that has been rested over the summer. The parasite can survive in the environment for up to 2 years, but is easily destroyed in hot, dry conditions. Ideally calf paddocks should be different each year.

Finding coccidiosis early and treating early is very rewarding, if you notice that your young stock aren't looking as well as you think they should, give us a call and we can investigate why!