

# Coccidiosis

Coccidiosis is a contagious disease affecting the bowel and is caused by a small parasite that is ingested from the pasture or ground. The condition affects calves in particular with the usual age affected being between 3 weeks and 6 months. It can also be seen in older animals especially if they are under 'stress' be it from environmental, disease or other causes. Occasionally we also see the condition in calves younger than 3 weeks.

## Clinical signs:

- Sudden death
- Scouring, with or without blood.
- Straining
- Dehydration may also occur
- Calves that recover may then show illthrift.

Some observations suggest that coccidiosis may lower defences against other diseases so these may be present as well.

Most calves in a group will become infected but the disease is self-limiting. As a good natural immunity develops only a few will develop symptoms. The majority of the calves in the group will be "vaccinated" by their mates and show no signs of the disease.

## Pathogenesis:

The parasite invades the bowel lining and passes through several developmental stages that cause haemorrhage and damage to the bowel lining. Death, diarrhoea with or without blood or no illness may occur. However, eggs are passed in the faeces in all cases. Infection occurs by ingestion of these eggs from the faeces of infected or carrier animals. The eggs can survive for up to two years and become infective under moist conditions. Circular Head has an ideal climate for the development and persistence of this parasite. Large numbers of eggs must be ingested to produce the disease. Therefore, coccidiosis is more common where a build-up of faecal contamination occurs. For example, in calf paddocks and around and in feed and water troughs.

From the time eggs are picked up to the onset of disease may be as short as fifteen days. As stated above, most cases recover without showing signs. Treatment involves the use of Sulpha drugs and electrolytes and is usually successful provided bowel damage or blood loss are not severe. Bowel damage may cause a setback in growth rates. The course of the disease is usually 5 - 6 days.

**Diagnosis** is based on the signs above and a very simple and cheap test done at our clinic. If necessary, post mortems can be performed to aid with diagnosis.

**Prevention:**

- Avoid overcrowding
- Regularly rotate calving paddocks
- Keep supplementary feeding off the ground where possible

Remember that Coccidiosis may mimic bracken fern poisoning, high worm burdens, some bacterial infections and may occur in conjunction with other diseases. If in doubt please ask.