

Contoccurs after wet weather when fields are muddy or bedding gets damp inside so treat lambs going outside when the forecast isn't good or fields are muddy. The challenges we all face with antibiotic resistance mean that if possible we should avoid injecting every lamb on any farm with antibiotics. The best antibiotics for joint ill aren't active given orally so the tablets and oral dosers/tablets are not useful in the prevention of joint ill
Judith Lee

Spring Vaccines

Despite the recent awful weather spring is approaching rapidly and hopefully turnout will appear on the horizon shortly! Please place your orders for your spring vaccines (BVD, Lepto, IBR and Huskvac) ASAP to ensure that you are ready to turnout when the weather comes good.

Free uploads to BVDFree database

English beef and dairy farmers can have their Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) test results uploaded to the national BVDFree database without charge until the end of March*.

The offer is open to all farmers who are registered with the BVDFree England scheme and is available for all results uploaded by the following labs: APHA, Biobest, CIS and NML. Farmers can register with the scheme at bvdfree.org.uk. The aim is to grow the number of searchable BVD statuses on the existing 65,000 strong database.

Farmers don't need to wait for the outcome of existing testing as they're able to have any results from the previous 12 months uploaded.

Bill Mellor, BVDFree Chairman, said: "We can only eliminate BVD from the national herd if farmers test their animals and load their results onto the central database. By removing the cost, we hope this is the final encouragement farmers need to take part in this crucial scheme.

"With the busy spring sale period approaching, farmers can often command an additional premium for animals known to be BVD free as well as giving buyers confidence in the status of purchased animals."

Farmers whose results are on the database can sell their animals with a known BVD status, which is especially important for those in the North of England as Scottish buyers require English animals to be tested for BVD.

*This offer is available for all results uploaded by the following labs: APHA, Biobest, CIS and NML.

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The 'Beast from the East' has certainly struck which makes everything a lot harder. Lambings are noticeably less abundant than last year, so far. There seems to be a big move away from early lambing- no doubt due to market forces and the restricted supply of forage in some cases. With straw prices continuing to climb, it's a prudent move for many not to be housing lambing sheep at the moment. We have seen some twin lamb cases around though, often complicated with low calcium pre-lambing and sometimes complicated by pneumonia too. Twin-lamb disease can open the gateway to other diseases developing. A few folk have had more than their fair share of liver fluke, in a couple of cases we strongly suspect that there is resistance to triclabendazole (TCBZ), in flocks with no previous history of problems and where TCBZ has been used sparingly in the past, rather than over-used. It will always pay to keep an eye on the health of your flock, especially where conditions like liver fluke can creep up and have a big impact on finances and, as importantly, morale at this busy time of year. Cows have largely been behaving themselves. There has been a drop in fertility on some farms in the dull dark days of December, but the winter blues seem to be wearing off and PD positives are picking up again. A few of these cows have stopped cycling, or developed a cyst after their downturn and if cows have not been seen bulling it's a good idea to check them out and see what is happening inside. We have had a few folks with multiple cows not cycling and they are just a strain on any herd if left untreated, especially with lots of hungry mouths to feed on a farm.

Lameness has had a bit of a surge in prevalence too- the build up of bugs on some farms leading to infectious foot conditions such as foul, digital dermatitis and slurry heel. Constant exposure to slurry has led to a weakening of hoof horn in quite a few cases too, with some pretty serious abscesses and toe necrosis cases. Prompt and complete treatment of these cases, with a check up one or two weeks later, will lead to a much better outcome for the cow- meaning she is less likely to need to have a claw amputated or be culled.

Richard Knight



Care of 'The Downer Cow'

Downer cows as we all know can be incredibly frustrating. Despite the initial cause of recumbency being rectified many stay down and often fail to ever get up again. This is usually due to 'downer cow syndrome'.

Downer cow syndrome is a term used to describe the muscle and nerve damage in the legs that develops due to a prolonged period of recumbency. In as little as six hours in sternal recumbency the underneath hind leg can become irreversibly damaged. Pressure on the muscles dramatically reduces the blood flow to them meaning they can't get enough oxygen or remove waste products like carbon dioxide etc. Some nerves run very close to the surface of the muscles and so they can become compressed and damaged too. So despite her looking bright and the initial cause of recumbency being solved her muscles and nerves may no longer function well enough to allow her to stand. Many of these changes are irreversible so we need to prevent them occurring with good nursing care.

- If a cow remains down for more than six hours call the vet.
- Treat the cow promptly. The longer she stays down the more likely she will succumb to downer cow syndrome.
- Put her on a soft lying surface such as a deep straw bed. Cows left on concrete carry a very poor prognosis as the muscles quickly become irreversibly damaged. If she goes down on concrete, move her to a soft lying surface as quickly as possible.
- Turn her every three hours. This may seem like a lot but it will greatly reduce the chances of muscle damage by relieving pressure on the muscles and nerves.
- Provide plenty of fresh food and water.
- Dairy cows should be milked after 12 hours of recumbency. This will reduce the risk of mastitis as well as making the cow a lot more comfortable.

A recent study showed that:

- 84% of recumbent cows had a degree of downer cow syndrome.
- If there was no evidence of downer cow syndrome then 54% of cows got back up.
- If there was evidence of downer cow syndrome only 14% got back up.
- If good nursing care was provided 43% recovered.
- **If nursing care was poor only 6% recovered.**



It can be difficult to tell if a cow has secondary damage to the muscles and nerves just by examination so we can take a blood test to measure enzymes released by damaged muscles to give us a better idea of prognosis. Speak to one of the farm vets for more information.

Jazmyn Smith

Joint ill in lambs

'Joint ill' is a bacterial infection of one of more joints in young lambs. The bacteria infect the lambs by a number of routes- orally, via the navel, via wounds including tagging sites, castration sites and docking sites especially as the tail detaches. The bacteria then enter the bloodstream and settle out in the joints. When samples are taken from young lambs and the bacteria cultured, more than 85% of them are infected with *Streptococcus Dysgalactiae*, a bacteria that also causes mastitis in cows.

These bacteria can come both from carrier ewes as well as the environment. The bacteria can survive for 6 weeks on bedding material like straw so if you are faced with an outbreak it will help to clean out the lambing pens completely and disinfect them thoroughly. As well as loving moist dirty conditions, it is able to survive in the dust in buildings contaminating taggers, ear tags etc. that are lying around. If you have dairy cows and sheep disinfect your boots as you move from cow buildings to work with sheep.

Although lambs are infected with the bacteria in the first few days of life, they usually don't become obviously lame until 5-10 days of age, often after turnout. Affected joints are swollen, hot and painful and lambs can be unwilling to stand on that leg at all. They lie down more frequently and struggle to keep up with their dams which reduces suckling. Sometimes the spine can be affected leading to paralysis of either the back legs alone or all 4 limbs. Even with treatment the resultant joint damage can severely affect growth.

How to treat joint ill

It is important to both identify affected lambs and start treatment quickly. Talk to one of the farm vets about which antibiotics are best. Antibiotic treatment will be needed for at least 5 days and lambs that are not responding after the first 5 days are unlikely to improve and euthanasia should be considered. Anti-inflammatories and occasionally steroids can help but only tiny doses are needed so this should be discussed with one of the vets.

How to prevent Joint ill

1. **Keep lambing pens clean ; if possible muck out and disinfect between ewes. This is especially important if you have an outbreak of joint ill.**
 2. **Ensure lambs get plenty of colostrum as this prevents the bacteria getting into the blood stream**
 3. **Treat navels promptly with iodine and repeat after 3-4 hours either with iodine or antibiotic spray**
 4. **Use surgical spirit in a spray bottle to disinfect taggers, ear tags, rings etc between lambs. Spray surgical spirit onto lambs ears before tagging**
 5. **Only if you have had a problem with joint ill, should you consider using injectable antibiotics as a preventative measure. However, you should try and target this to lambs that are more likely to be at risk e.g because they didn't get enough colostrum :- twins, triplets, lambs from ewes in poor condition. An outbreak often**
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