

# Farm news

May 2023

## New fatal genetic condition identified in daughters of a Holstein Friesian bull

We've recently been made aware of a new, fatal genetic condition occurring in Holstein Friesian heifers sired by a particular bull – see below for more details. This highlights the importance of investigating illness and death in livestock, and of the APHA's UK surveillance network. If all the affected farms had put these heifer deaths down as 'just one of those things, it's not worth investigating', this syndrome and the bull in question might never have been identified.

So to summarise...

In the 2022 APHA quarterly surveillance reports for Great Britain, cases of apparent gastroparesis in 9-24 month, Holstein Friesian, bulling and in-calf dairy heifers were described. To date the majority, or all, of the affected heifers have had the same sire.

The heifers typically present with progressive abdominal distension and condition loss, become inappetent, are non-responsive to treatment, and have had to be euthanised. No obvious dietary or management risk factors have been identified. APHA has received either submissions or reports related to at least 15 affected farms in the UK.

At post-mortem examination, the abdomen and the rumen are markedly distended, and the ruminal contents have a distinctive frothy texture. Abomasal impaction and/or ulceration has also been a feature of some of the cases. One of the affected farms uses a cow monitoring system, which records rumen function, and the outputs demonstrated markedly reduced, and eventually absent, rumen contractions at the time when the clinical signs became apparent and then worsened.

The breeding company has been working with partners across the UK disease surveillance network, private vets, and a specialist genetic research team in France since May 2022. At the time of writing, the mechanism underlying this syndrome is uncertain.

## Medicine Matters

Hurray! Our favourite Calciject 40%, aka Calciject 5, aka Calcium Red Top, is firmly back on our shelves after a long period of being unavailable.

I wish I could say the same for all the clostridial vaccines (Bravoxin, Covexin, Lambivac and Heptavac P) and both leptovaccines (Spirovac and Leptavoid H). We're incredibly frustrated by the supply issues with these vaccines and we know that you are too. It's a country-wide issue, and we've been told it's to do with Brexit, but knowing that doesn't make it any easier when you've got a paddock full of lambs needing their Heptavac injections.

Please be patient with us but also please do keep trying – we will source the next-best alternative wherever and whenever we can, and occasionally we do get a small delivery of vaccines when some become available.



**Carolyn Baguley MA  
VetMB CertAVP(Cattle)  
MRCVS**



Blood and tissue samples from affected and non-affected (control) animals are currently being analysed to try and uncover the precise genetic mechanism and will hopefully aid better understanding of this syndrome.

The working hypothesis is that the sire carried a de novo (new) mutation that is inherited in a dominant fashion. There appears to be mosaicism of the bull's germ cells, where there is more than one genetic line of the germ cells (as the result of genetic mutation), and the condition appears to develop in approximately 25% of his offspring. It is thought that animals sired by this bull which are functioning normally beyond their first calving are unlikely to have inherited the mutation.

The bull has been removed from AI service and his semen has been removed from the market. He does not have any sons in AI service. The breeding company will contact customers directly who bought this bull's semen. Farmers that suspect they have experienced cases, but that have not yet been approached by the breeding company, should contact the breeding company directly.

The APHA Cattle Expert Group, which has members across the UK surveillance network, is interested to hear about similar cases, so that it can continue to increase awareness, and develop greater understanding, of this issue.

If you'd like to know more about this, please let us know. And please do continue to investigate unexplained illnesses and deaths -the APHA post-mortem service provides excellent-quality post-mortem examinations by highly trained vets at a heavily subsidised price. It's very worthwhile using it for the information it provides not just at an individual farm level but at a country level to give us an idea of how disease patterns are changing over time.

(Thanks to Vanessa Swinson, veterinary lead of the APHA Cattle Expert Group, for co-ordinating this information for BCVA members).

# Abortions in your flock this year?

## FlockCheck 2023



Don't forget that MSD Animal Health, the makers of toxovax and enzovax, are running their FlockCheck scheme again this year, which will run until June. It is designed for flocks with 100 or more breeding ewes, but if you're interested in accessing the funding and your flock is smaller than that, please speak to us.

Blood samples are taken from 6-8 barren or aborted ewes and tested for antibodies against *Chlamydia abortus* (EAE) and *Toxoplasma gondii*, two of the most common causes of abortion in ewes. MSD will pay the lab fees for these samples.

The testing is designed for ewes that were scanned in lamb and then never lambed, or ones that were known to abort (the antibodies start to wane after 3 months and so there's a risk of false negatives if ewes that never got in lamb are tested). It's not suitable for ewes that have been vaccinated against these two diseases.

If you've had early/mid pregnancy losses or later abortions in your flock and would like to access the funding, please speak to one of our vets.

## Industry TB update



From 1st August 2023 compulsory post-movement testing (a policy that has operated in the Low Risk Area since 2016) will be introduced for cattle moved to herds in the annual surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area. This follows on from a public consultation held in 2021.

In summary, cattle (including farmed bison and Asiatic water buffalo) moved to herds in annual surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area may require compulsory post-movement testing if they are moving from:

- Six monthly surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area of England
- High Risk Area (HRA) of England
- Wales

A small number of specific exemptions to post-movement testing will apply, mirroring those that already apply in the Low Risk Area. Cattle keepers will be responsible for arranging and paying for a post-movement test although a government funded whole herd surveillance test can be used as a post-movement test if the timing works.

Cattle moved to herds in annual surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area will not require compulsory post-movement testing if they are moving from:

- Scotland
- Low Risk Area of England
- Annual surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area in England

APHA will be writing to all cattle keepers in annual surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area advising them of this upcoming policy change.

Further details can be found on the TB Hub - <https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-policy/england/post-movement-testing-in-annual-surveillance-testing-parts-of-the-edge-area/>

Don't forget to book your **FREE** TBAS visits!



We've now done a lot of TBAS visits and farmers are finding them really worthwhile.

As a reminder, the TB Advisory Service (TBAS) is offering two free visits (yes, that's right, they are completely free!) by trained vets to assess your farm and give tailored advice to reduce the risk and impact of TB. After the first visit four simple, cost effective, practical recommendations will be made, based on the risks identified. These two visits, 6 months apart, are fully funded by Defra, so there is no cost to eligible farmers. The first visit takes a couple of hours, the second is shorter.

Defra is now funding the TB Advisory Service for the whole of England (previously it was only available for farmers in the high risk and edge areas). This new round of funding is not just restricted to cattle farmers - it also allows those farmers of other TB susceptible species (camelids, deer, goats, pigs and sheep) to have visits.

A number of our vets are now fully trained to deliver the TBAS service. If you haven't had a visit yet, do speak to your regular vet, call the Markeaton practice or sign up via the TBAS website where you can name Scarsdale as your preferred vet to deliver the service.

### Farm and Equine Centre

Markeaton Lane, Markeaton, Derby DE22 4NH  
01332 294929

Alfreton  
01773 304900

Pride Veterinary Centre  
01332 678333

Allestree  
01332 554422

Shelton Lock  
01332 700321

Hilton  
01283 732999

Stapenhill  
01283 568162

Langley Mill  
01773 304914

Stretton  
01283 565333

Mickleover  
01332 518585

Oakwood  
01332 666500