

All the latest news and advice from our expert team



Farm news

December 2025



It's a dog's life
Carolyn Baguley MRCVS



I know that many of those hard-working farm dogs out there are actually pampered pooches in their spare time, so just a reminder to be careful with your Christmas dinner leftovers – much of our festive fayre is toxic to dogs, including Christmas pudding and mince pies (because of the raisins), grapes, chocolate (the higher the cocoa content, the worse it gets), onions (think stuffing or gravy) and macadamia nuts. Alcohol and blue cheese aren't ideal either, and festive plants such as holly, mistletoe and poinsettia should be kept out of dog-nibbling reach.

And don't forget that if you or your animals eat any Christmas decorations, you may be at risk of catching tinselitis... (sorry!)

*If you have a suspect case, we will contact the local APHA Veterinary Investigation Centre for more information and to discuss appropriate sampling, or the submission of a fetus with placenta. The submission of a fetus and placenta may be preferable to enable investigation of other causes of abortion, in addition to SBV being tested for without additional charge.

The detection of the virus in brain tissue is dependent on the stage of gestation that the fetus became infected, and therefore a PCR test may be negative despite SBV involvement. Therefore, in addition, serum samples can also be submitted from up to 6 cows/heifers or 6 ewes, including the dams of aborted calves/lambs, to test for antibodies to SBV.

For further information, see;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schmallenberg-virus/schmallenberg-virus>

Don't forget that Bluetongue can cause deformed lambs and calves too, and so it may be that the APHA's Veterinary Investigation Officer decides to test for Bluetongue as well as SBV in eligible cases. Some serotypes of BTV can cause arthrogryposis like SBV does, although it seems that the current major strain in the UK, BTV-3, more often causes 'dummy calves', blindness, weakness etc (see last month's newsletter for more details!).



Schmallenberg virus (SBV) surveillance.

The APHA surveillance network recorded several cases of deformed stillborn lambs and calves associated with SBV infection in the 2024/25 lambing and calving season.

APHA will continue to offer free-of-charge testing into 2026 (following discussion with a Veterinary Investigation Officer*) on samples from lambs, kids, and calves born with arthrogryposis (where joints are bent and stiff), or other musculoskeletal deformities. A fresh brain sample (brain stem is preferred) will be tested free of charge (FOC) if submitted to APHA.

This free testing initiative aims to investigate the role of SBV in such cases, to provide ongoing information about the geographic distribution and epidemiology of SBV, and to detect new and re-emerging threats with a similar presentation. Over the last three years differential diagnoses have included identifying new genetic diseases.

PRACTICAL LAMBING COURSES



JOIN US FOR SOME HANDS ON PRACTICAL LAMBING COURSES AT OUR MARKEATON PRACTICE.

27TH JAN AND 5TH FEB 2026

£78.80 + VAT

10AM-2PM

PLEASE CALL THE PRACTICE TO SECURE YOUR PLACE

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Scarsdale Vets

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Scarsdale Vets Farm

Acorn toxicity – lessons for the future?

Thanks to AHDB and APHA Shrewsbury for their informative articles which this is based on.



Outbreaks of acorn poisoning tend to occur after stormy weather, when large numbers of acorns fall from trees, but also arise in mast years – years like this year, when oak trees produce a bumper crop.

Most years occur in cycles every few years, but the number of cases of acorn or oak poisoning in sheep and cattle this autumn has been exceptional. This year’s warm, dry spring may have encouraged a larger than usual acorn crop, and livestock seem to have been particularly attracted to acorns this autumn, possibly due to a low fibre content or other deficiencies in the lush autumn grass.

Although many livestock species can suffer from acorn poisoning, cattle and sheep are most affected and mortality rates can reach 70%. Pigs are more tolerant.

Acorns and oak leaves (especially young leaves) contain phenols and tannins that are toxic when ingested in large quantities and cause gastrointestinal irritation, liver damage and kidney damage. Kidney failure is the most common cause of death.

Clinical signs usually occur three to seven days after consuming a toxic dose, and may include:

- Loss of appetite
- Depression
- Colic
- Excessive drinking or dehydration
- Excessive urination
- Blood in urine
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin)
- Constipation, followed by black tarry faeces and diarrhoea (which may be haemorrhagic)
- Bloat
- Death – severely affected animals die within 24 to 72 hours
- Malformed calves and abortions

Diagnosis can be tricky and is based on clinical signs, history, blood tests, post-mortem examination of the kidneys and ruling out other causes.

Unfortunately, there is no specific treatment or antidote. If acorn poisoning is suspected, remove animals from the acorns immediately if possible, minimise stress and ensure animals have good access to fresh water to prevent dehydration, and then give us a ring to discuss supportive treatment options.



Severely affected animals that do survive may lose weight and fail to thrive.

With limited treatment options, early action and prevention are key. Check fields with oak trees daily, particularly following storms where large quantities of green acorns may be blown to the ground. Move livestock away where acorn fall is heavy. If it is not possible to move livestock away from or to remove acorns, provide attractive alternative food sources so they will be less likely to consume large quantities of acorns – it’s worse when they’re hungry.

If you’ve suffered losses from acorn poisoning this year, have a think ahead of next year as to whether there’s any way you can avoid affected paddocks or mitigate the effects in future years.

TBAS Delivery: Year 5 extension

As we complete the fourth year of the TBAS contract, we are pleased to announce that a 12 month extension has now been confirmed by DEFRA. This is testament to the hard work of all the practices and advisors involved in generating interest in the service, arranging and carrying out visits to the highest standards, and allowing TBAS to demonstrate that these visits are having a real impact on farmer engagement and the disease situation on farm.

Reminder: What is TBAS and who is eligible?

The TB Advisory Service is a DEFRA funded project that offers FREE, bespoke, practical and cost-effective advice to all eligible farmers in England to help reduce the risks associated with TB. All keepers in England with a valid CPH number with stock of a bovine TB susceptible species are eligible for TBAS Visits. TBAS isn’t just for cattle farmers, but also includes Camelids, Deer, Goats, Pigs and Sheep!

If you’re interested in having a TBAS visit or need more information, don’t hesitate to contact us.



Christmas opening hours

December
 22nd / 23rd / 24th : Open normal hours (8.30AM-5.30PM)
 25th / 26th : Closed, emergencies only
 27th : Open normal hours (8.30 - 12.30) then emergencies only
 28th : Closed, emergencies only
 29th / 30th / 31st : Open normal hours

January
 1st : Closed, emergencies only
 2nd onwards: Normal hours resume



Christmas drug orders

Last orders for collection before Christmas:
 Mon 22nd before noon.

Last orders for collection before New Year’s Eve:
 Mon 29th before noon.

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	Micklegate 01332 518585	Oakwood 01332 666500
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