



WELCOME TO farm news



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BVD 'Tag and Test' Scheme



Fay Pooley BVMedSci BVM BVS MRCVS

BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhoea) is one of the most common infectious diseases of cattle in the UK, and is a major cause of abortion and production losses. Control of BVD is often perceived to be as simple as an annual vaccination, but this is not always a failsafe plan.

The most dangerous time for cows to be infected is within the first 4 months of pregnancy. Although this will not necessarily harm the cow, it may produce a calf which is persistently infected with BVD. These 'PI' calves shed huge amounts of virus throughout their life, which puts cattle in contact with them (even briefly) at risk of both BVD infection and other diseases, since BVD suppresses the immune system.

For those farms that do vaccinate, it is still important to monitor for PI animals. This is partly in case of vaccine breakdown (there are many factors which can reduce the vaccine's efficacy, e.g. incorrect timing or route of administration and incorrect vaccine storage), and partly because, if PIs are not searched for and eliminated at the beginning of a BVD control programme, they may remain undetected in the herd and give birth to further PIs, which will not respond to vaccination.

Monitoring for PIs can be done in a number of ways. One way is to periodically blood sample a group of sentinel unvaccinated heifers between 8 and 12 months of age, to see if they have been exposed to the virus. Another way is to use the new cow-side BVD 'tag and test' tags. These tags will punch out a small amount of ear tissue when inserted, which can then be tested back at the practice to see if the animal is persistently infected. If it isn't, a certificate can be produced declaring that the animal is not persistently infected with BVD. The tags can be primary or secondary tags printed with the animals' number, or management tags printed with a management number of your choice.

For those who don't vaccinate because the herd is naïve, tagging and testing calves as they are born, or later in life, is an excellent monitoring tool for young stock which are going to be herd replacements.

Tagging can be done at any age, since the PI test is not affected by age or vaccination status (particularly handy if you want to vaccinate calves for pneumonia with, for example, Rispoval 4, as the BVD component in this vaccine will not affect the test.). These tags can also be used at pre-movement tests before animals go to market - animals can be tagged on day one and the result will be known by day two, allowing the animals to be sold as BVD-free. It is increasingly common that a higher price will be paid at market for animals with a known BVD status. The tag, as well as the certificate, provides ample proof.



A BVD 'tag and test' tag being inserted.

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A Cautionary Tale...

Carolyn Baguley MA VetMB
CertAVP (cattle) MRCVS

...regarding calf stomach tubes! Although the 2L calf stomach tube bags (often used for giving colostrum to newborns, or electrolytes to calves with diarrhoea) are supposed to be single use (no really, they are - it says on the bag!), they're often used time and again. We're aware of several incidences where either part of, or the entire, solid portion of the tube has detached, and been left inside the calf. The photo is of a calf brought to us recently, where the hard part of the tube had become detached at the junction with the softer part. We could feel one end of the tube halfway down the calf's neck, while the other end was way down inside the stomach (looking at the length of it, it seems like it should have been coming out the back end!). It was very difficult to get to, and we only managed to extract it (with the help of an endoscope) after well over an hour of trying. Unfortunately, the damage was too great and the calf died a couple of days later.



We also know of occasions where a cold tube, filled with warm colostrum, has suddenly expanded and snapped, leaving the end inside the calf.

So... before you use your tube, just check the condition of it, and make sure the join of the two parts of the tube doesn't seem loose. And during the cold weather especially, warm the tube up beforehand!

Carolyn Baguley MA VetMB CertAVP (Cattle) MRCVS

Is Blackleg on your Blacklist?

Have any of your cattle ever died suddenly, without you knowing why? Did you have a post mortem, or pass it off as 'just one of those things'? How many youngstock have you lost over the past 10 years?

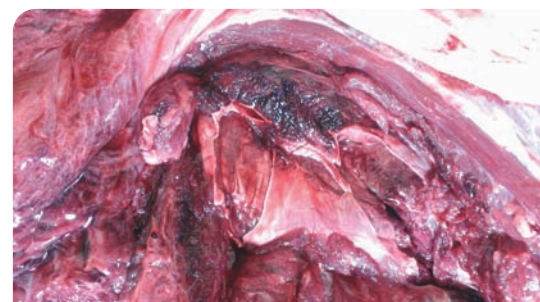


Many of these sudden, unexplained deaths are caused by blackleg. Blackleg is a disease caused by the bacteria *Clostridium chauvoei*, a member of the clostridial family.

Cl. chauvoei lives in soil, and is ingested by cattle when grazing pasture or when eating contaminated silage (silages harvested under wet conditions, contaminated with soil or poorly fermented are particularly risky). After ingestion, the bacterial spores travel round the bloodstream and settle out into the muscles (and occasionally the heart, liver or spleen). The spores then lie dormant until they are activated, which often happens after injuries causing muscle damage or bruising. As the bacteria multiply, they produce toxins which cause the characteristic muscular gas gangrene and systemic toxæmia.

Treatment of blackleg can be attempted with high doses of penicillin, but is often unsuccessful since disease progression is rapid and the lesions are extensive and severe – often, animals are simply found dead with no prior signs.

Blackleg is usually seen in young cattle between 6 months and 2 years of age. Rapidly-growing cattle on high planes of nutrition appear to be at increased risk. The true incidence of blackleg in the UK is unknown, although it's probably more common than we think. Blackleg incidence tends to be seasonal, peaking in warmer weather, and an association with average annual rainfall has been demonstrated. High rainfall may disseminate spores over a wider



The section of muscle at the top of the picture has a dark, 'cooked' appearance, typical of blackleg.

area, cause soil saturation and anaerobic conditions, thus favouring *Cl. chauvoei* multiplication and, by providing good pasture, result in well-nourished animals with heavy muscles.

While treatment is difficult, vaccination is nearly 100% efficacious in preventing blackleg. The multivalent clostridial vaccines are also very good value for money - they're cheap to start with, and the 10-in-1 vaccines protect against ten clostridial diseases for the price of one!

Many of these other clostridial diseases that the vaccines protect against - e.g. black disease, bacillary haemoglobinuria and malignant oedema - also cause sudden death. Malignant oedema is caused by entry of various types of clostridia into wounds - dirty needles can be responsible for this! *Cl. sordelli* has been associated with abomasitis and sudden death in neonatal calves. Tetanus is also in the vaccine mix.

We'd highly recommend using clostridial vaccines. Financially, it's a no-brainer - at not much more than £1 a dose, saving a single life will pay for the herd vaccine many times over. Cows should be fully vaccinated before pregnancy, with a booster between 8 and 2 weeks before calving. This will provide colostral immunity to the calves (N.B. none of the available clostridial or blackleg vaccines are recommended for use in the first or second trimester of pregnancy). Young stock should then receive their own primary vaccine course at 8-12 weeks of age, or at 2 weeks of age if their dams were not vaccinated.

Clostridial vaccines are equally as important for sheep - again, it's well-grown lambs that tend to be affected.

Do your animals a good turn, and have a word with your vet about clostridial vaccination. What have you got to lose?

Meet the Team: Angela

This year, we thought we'd include a new feature in the newsletter. We'd like to introduce you to our receptionists and support staff, so you can put faces to names, and not just know them as a voice at the end of the phone! We start the year off in style, with Angela Woolley.



Angela has been a member of the team for 26 years now, and has seen lots of changes in that time. She started working at the South

Street branch in Derby when it was mainly farm animals and only a small amount of equine, but now at Markeaton there is far more equine work than there was, and the farms are much further afield.

Angela has been involved in farming for most of her life - her uncle was a beef farmer, and now her husband Philip is a part-time sheep farmer. Out of work, Angela enjoys spending time with her two grandchildren, Jack and Bradley, and loves working at her arts and crafts. Angela also likes to go out and enjoy the Derbyshire countryside.