

# Farm news



**Vikki Wyse**  
PgCVetEd MRCVS

## BVD in the dairy herd: now and next

The UK BVD eradication programmes are making good progress, but BVD still remains an issue of concern until eradication is complete. The persistently infected (PI) animal is central to the control of BVD on-farm, and so eradication centres around:

1. Identifying and removing PIs
2. Biosecurity to prevent introduction of BVD
3. Effective vaccination to protect the fetus

### Protecting the herd

Biosecurity is hugely important, and the fourth **National BVD Survey** revealed an on-going theme, particularly that **not all closed herds are actually closed**. BVD breakdowns continue to be reported across the country, often due to an oversight when purchasing new stock, such as in-calf animals where the unborn calf had been exposed to the virus. Another common way the virus gets into a herd is when stock is moved to a field without double fencing and encounters BVD positive neighbouring stock. Of the "closed" herds in the survey **2% rear calves away, 19% bring bulls in, 2% buy in heifers or cows and 1% purchase fattening stock**. Hence the need for ongoing surveillance, good biosecurity and vaccination to maintain herd protection.

### Choosing the best testing options

A BVD Control Strategy is now part of the Red Tractor standards, so we advise all farms to have a plan in place for routine testing, plus control and eradication if required. The simplest and most cost-effective means of routine monitoring is to use the Tag&Test tags at around £5/animal. This is also the most used method in the UK at 33% of farms, up from 27% in 2018.

However, only 42% of producers are **tagging all calves born, dead or alive**, which is concerning. Failing to tag all calves means that a PI can stay on farm without detection, causing health and productivity problems, with disastrous effects on a farm's eradication policy. Other methods include regular bulk milk screening for the presence of virus, and youngstock screening. We can help you find the best monitoring methods for your herd. If you're not using tags, we recommend twice yearly routine youngstock screen (homebred unvaccinated 9-18 months old) and any bought-in animals, plus quarterly bulk milk virus (PCR) testing.



### Should I cull the PIs? Can't I just fatten them?

PIs should be removed when identified, and yet the survey revealed that nearly half of farmers retain them. The reasons producers held onto PIs were because the animals looked healthy, they doubted the result, they had successfully reared PIs to slaughter or another farmer advised them to.

Among farmers that had identified a PI animal  
44% decided not to cull them immediately.

77% of those animals then either died before reaching a productive size, or had to be treated for other conditions.

When asked whether they would knowingly retain a PI animal again, 93% said they wouldn't.

### My bulk milk is positive, but I don't think I can see any impact of BVD on my herd...

Unvaccinated cows in positive herds, without overt signs of disease:

- Lost up to 10% of their yield per day
- Had significantly lower 305-day milk production, fat and proteins
- Were twice as likely to be culled because of decreased milk production

### Is Vaccination Worth the Cost?

Biosecurity can be problematic in the best of herds and vaccination is an effective way to protect the unborn fetus and help break the cycle of infection. In England most herds vaccinate, with key selection criteria being ease of use and the 'best vaccine for the job'. Most farmers who vaccinate do so on vet recommendation and as an insurance policy i.e. to prevent infection rather than waiting until exposure or signs of infection occurring. Most producers estimate the impact of BVD to cost **£44-100/cow/year**. The economic benefit of vaccinating a dairy herd with Bovela<sup>®</sup>, on milk production alone, is up to **£56 per cow per lactation**. Most producers also noticed a **decrease in calf diseases, followed by improved fertility and decreased antibiotic usage**, which is certainly a hot topic at the moment.

Increasingly farmers are opting to use Bovela<sup>®</sup> BVD vaccine, due its proven 12 months' duration of protection and easy one dose starter and annual vaccination schedule, and is now the UK's market leading BVD vaccine.

**Eradication of BVD can be achieved**, and this latest survey shows how seriously the industry is taking this important disease. For more information see <https://bvdfree.org.uk/> If you would like to discuss any aspects further, then get in touch with the practice or directly with your routine vet.

**Keep disease control simple:**  
Quarantine and test stock for BVD before introducing them to your herd

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For more information call our practice on **01332 294929**  
or email [farmandequine@scarsdalevets.com](mailto:farmandequine@scarsdalevets.com)

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# Heat stress in calves

Now that we are (hopefully!) entering into some more pleasant summer weather, it is worth remembering that both cows and calves can sometimes struggle in the warm weather, just as we do. If you are sweating, your animals are likely to be sweating too!



For calves, their **upper critical temperature** (the temperature above which the calves' internal body temperature begins to rise and they become 'heat stressed') is 25°C. Once this ambient temperature is reached then calves must use energy to try and keep cool, typically through the following methods:

- Breathing quicker
- Drinking more milk and eating less solid feed
- Drinking more water
- Spending more time standing up rather than laying down

The energy required to cool the body down is diverted from other essential functions and, as such, growth and the ability of the immune system to fight infections are typically reduced.

There are several things that we can do to help reduce the chances of heat stress and minimise the negative effects on calf growth rates and the immune system. These include:

- Allowing access to clean, fresh water **at all times**.
- **Keeping water out of the sunlight** and changing it often. Locating water troughs/buckets away from bedding is also useful to **prevent wet bedding** which can then heat up.
- **Monitoring the temperature inside calf accommodation**. This should be done **at calf level** as the temperature may be higher here than higher up within the shed. **Increasing the airflow** in the shed can also be considered so long as draughts are not created at calf level as this can then lead to chilling.
- **Checking on the calves regularly** for signs of heat stress (sweating, panting, excessive drinking). You can also monitor the rectal temperature of calves with a temperature (in an otherwise healthy calf) over 39.4°C being indicative of heat-stress.
- Allowing access to **increased volumes of milk or concentration of milk solids** as a source of extra energy.
- **Providing shade** for calves will help to keep calves cool and providing **good fly control** can help reduce the spread of fly-borne diseases.
- **Keeping water and milk feeding equipment clean and disinfected** – warm weather promotes bacterial growth on this equipment.

It is important to remember that in sheds with poor airflow, high humidity and high stocking density, you can still see signs of heat stress in animals even when the weather is not that warm! This can especially be true in sheds with clear 'roof light' panels in the roof, as although they reduce the need for electrical lighting, they can vastly increase the temperature within a shed. These type of roof panels should only ever be fitted to the north-facing aspects of building to minimise this issue.

If you have any further questions or queries about heat stress in calves, please contact us at the practice.

## Surveillance Focus: Cold Cow Syndrome

The APHA (Animal and Plant Health Agency) have recently seen several separate cases of perineal oedema in cows out at pasture. In one case, around 10% of the herd were affected, showing signs of marked swelling of the perineal and vulval region. Diarrhoea was also noted. These signs are suggestive of 'cold cow syndrome' (animals often also have cold extremities, hence the name); occasionally animals have also been seen to appear drunk and have odd respiratory noises. The cause of this syndrome is unknown, but zearalenone (an oestrogenic toxin, produced by some moulds) has been associated with it. If cows are moved off the pasture or given alternative feed the condition should resolve.

## COVID TB testing amendments to be discontinued

Last year APHA introduced some temporary amendments for vets and farmers when TB testing to mitigate some of the risks associated with the spread of COVID and the ability to maintain social distancing. APHA have now announced that they are discontinuing these measures, in line with the lifting of public health restrictions and improving COVID situation. The following changes will come into effect this summer:

1. From 1st July 2021, any overdue tests can no longer cite COVID-19 as a reason. Farmers with outstanding TB tests will be referred to the relevant Rural Payments Agency.
2. Calves under 180 days of age, that were previously permitted to be exempt from surveillance TB testing if they could not be tested with social distancing in place, will no longer be allowed to be exempt for this reason. This will come into place in England and Wales from 1st August 2021. Thereafter, TB tests will need to include all eligible animals on the farm.
3. The ability to extend a short interval testing window by 30 days due to COVID reasons will no longer be permitted. This comes into force for England and Wales on 1st July 2021.

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