

Farm news

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Drenching Done Right!

It might be a bolus, a wormer or a vitamin drench, but no matter what you're treating your animals for - or protecting them against - it's important to make sure you're doing it right!

When used correctly, and maintained properly, a good drench gun is designed to minimize the chance of delivering the bolus or drench into the wrong location and reduce the chance of physical damage or trauma to the throat. Liquid oral medication can be administered via traditional syringe, but this is less accurate and will increase the chance of delivering the fluid into the trachea (airway) of the animal, or damaging the throat by rough handling.

Whilst drench gun injuries are more commonly associated with sheep (as we saw in the case I covered in Flock News this quarter), they are also seen in both beef and dairy cattle - often more commonly associated with bolus administration or flukicide treatment.

Most commonly seen at post-mortem examination following sudden death(s) in cattle; drench or bolus gun injuries do not always cause sudden death. Other symptoms can include nasal discharge, facial and jawline swellings, reduced voluntary feed intake and even milk drop in dairy cattle.

Sudden death can present shortly after bolusing if intense trauma, asphyxiation of drench/bolus content or rupture of vessels occurs. Alternatively, we may see abscesses form within the oral cavity which can then erode the mucosa of the oral cavity, eventually reaching the major blood vessels in the neck causing mass haemorrhage and sudden death (see photos of a dosing gun injury in a dairy cow from a Kexxtone bolus).

Injuries are not inevitable though and there are some simple steps that can be taken to reduce the risk to your livestock at drench and/or bolus time.

Here are our top 7 tips to prevent drench or bolus gun injuries:

1. Use the correct size drench gun for your animals - significant trauma occurs when the wrong size drench gun is used.
2. Check the angle of the arm - any bending or impact on the gun may change the angle and increase the risk.
3. Is the person drenching the livestock trained and capable of doing so? Can training be given if not?
4. Restrain the animals properly - use a cattle crush and race, or have two people to make it easier for youngstock.
5. Maintain your drench gun! Ensure it's delivering the dose it says (calibration), but also ensure it's not worn and there are no sharp spurs on the end.
6. Place the nozzle over the back of the tongue to introduce the dose into the back of the throat so it's all swallowed.
7. Consider if the treatment is needed. Many animals are drenched when there isn't a need for it, putting animals at risk for no medical benefit.



Dosing gun injury damage seen at post-mortem in an adult dairy cow, following Kexxtone bolus application.

Photos provided by School of Veterinary Medicine and Science - University of Nottingham, the Animal and Plant Health Agency and Ben Strugnell of Farm Vet Post Mortems Ltd.

Herd Health Plans

Just a reminder that we need at least a week's notice for Herd Health Plans in order to get all the paperwork ready. If you ask for a Health Plan at short notice we get all rushed and flustered, and nobody likes a flustered vet!

Go BVD Free

for FREE

with Scarsdale Vets!

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) is a disease that has been on the radar for a long time, and yet still causes huge economic impacts on UK cattle farms through reproductive failure and production losses. Many countries have launched national eradication schemes, making the control of the disease compulsory. The different regions of the UK are taking different approaches to BVD; in England the control measures are still voluntary and vary greatly from farm to farm.

At Scarsdale we recognise the huge importance of BVD and we want to make sure we are doing everything in our power to control this disease on our farms. We are therefore launching our 'Go BVD free for free with Scarsdale Vets' campaign to run for a period of 12 months.

What is BVD, and how does it get transmitted?

BVD is a viral disease of cattle that affects the reproductive performance of breeding animals, causes varied disease syndromes in infected animals and lowers their immunity.

The virus is spread through contact with an infected animal. The infected animal can take two forms:

Transiently Infected (TI): These are animals that are born free of the virus but get exposed to it at some point in life. They develop a transient infection for about 10 days and then recover. While they are infected, animals may scour, and their immune systems will be suppressed, making them more susceptible to other infectious diseases such as pneumonia. Transient infection of breeding animals can reduce fertility. Transient infection of pregnant animals can lead to abortion, congenital defects or the creation of a persistently infected calf.

Persistently Infected (PI): These are the most dangerous animals in terms of the spread of the virus. Because they were infected in utero, their body doesn't recognise the disease and the virus is allowed to replicate unchecked, making the PI a huge source of infection to other animals. At some point during the PI's life, the virus suddenly mutates into a highly pathogenic form, and the PI will develop severe scour and ulceration of the GI tract and will die within a couple of weeks. PI animals can't reliably be identified by eye - some may be poor doers with stunted growth, birth deformities, pneumonia or diarrhoea, while others can go unnoticed on the farm for years, spreading the virus.

Both TI and PI animals pose a high risk for the spread of the disease.



Do you know your herd BVD status?

Finding out your herd disease status is the first step to controlling this disease. It's easy to do, so if you don't already know and would like to find out, just let us know.

Becoming a BVD-free herd brings a huge range of benefits from an economic point of view, as well as in terms of animal welfare on farm. Assurance organisations like Red Tractor and milk buyers are starting to request that farm have a disease control plan for BVD.

In England, BVDFree is aiming to get farmers signed up to their voluntary scheme and help to eradicate this disease. More details can be found at bvdfree.org.uk.

Once your herd status is known, we can then take steps to create a plan to deal with BVD in your herd. This could take one of two forms:

1. **Negative status herd – Work with us on a plan to keep BVD out of your farm, focusing on biosecurity and vaccination.**
2. **Positive status herd – Work on a plan to suit the business to eradicate the disease from the herd and improve biosecurity to stop BVD getting in again.**

These plans will be specific to each farm, so our vets will work with you through the process and help you where needed.

A closed herd tends to be the best means of keeping BVD or other diseases out, but this isn't always practical on all farms, meaning that biosecurity will be compromised. Husbandry procedures that could increase the risk of a BVD outbreak on farm include:

- Purchase of animals of unknown status (including unborn calves still inside their dams)
- Direct contact with neighbouring cattle farms
- Farm equipment/machinery/clothing contaminated by animals of unknown status

Vaccination is an important tool to aid biosecurity measures, and this is where we at Scarsdale are committed to helping our farms.

If you work with us to investigate your herd BVD status and formulate a control plan in line with the BVDFree guidelines, we will commit to provide you with BVD vaccine for your herd for a 12-month period for free.

BVD vaccines need to be given to breeding stock before they get in calf in order to prevent the creation of the PIs that spread and maintain the disease. The vaccine is also very effective at protecting animals if a PI should join the herd at any point.

We are confident that, with the vaccination and the disease control plan developed with our vets, we can help you achieve a BVD free status herd and maintain it until the disease is finally eradicated from the UK. The stated intention of the UK cattle industry is to eradicate BVD by 2031. Can we achieve this together?

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