WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

Pneumonia in Cattle: Causes, Treatment & Prevention

As cattle move indoors for the winter months, the risk of respiratory disease rises sharply. Pneumonia is one of the most common and costly health challenges in housed cattle, affecting growth rates, fertility and even long-term herd productivity.

Causes

Pneumonia is usually triggered by a combination of stress factors and infectious agents.

Environmental factors: poor ventilation, high humidity, overcrowding, and fluctuating temperatures.

Stressors: transport, weaning, mixing groups, or dietary changes weaken the immune system.

Pathogens: viruses (e.g. Bovine Respiratory Scyncytial Virus, Parainfluenza Virus 3, Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis, Bluetongue Virus) and bacteria (e.g. Pasteurella multocida, Mannheimia haemolytica, Histophilus somni). Lungworm is also a possibility. Often, viral infections open the door for bacterial pneumonia.

Signs to Watch For

- Coughing, nasal discharge, or increased respiratory effort
- Fever, dullness, or reduced appetite
- Drop in growth rates or milk yield
- Animals standing with head extended and ears drooping

Treatment

Early intervention and veterinary diagnosis are key. This might involve nasopharyngeal swabs, blood samples or a

test called a trans tracheal wash which takes samples of fluid directly from the windpipe. It is important to determine whether antibiotics are required and which ones would be best. Anti-inflammatories (such as Metacam) and supportive care are often beneficial, and isolation of affected animals can help prevent spread.

Record-keeping of cases and outcomes of respiratory disease can help refine future prevention strategies.

Prevention Strategies

Housing: ensure good airflow without draughts, adequate space per animal, and dry bedding.

Vaccination: speak to your vet about tailored vaccination plans for viruses and bacteria most relevant to your herd.

Nutrition: provide balanced diets with sufficient trace elements and vitamins to support immunity.

Management: reduce stress at weaning and grouping, and avoid mixing animals of very different ages and sizes.

Monitoring: check animals daily and act quickly on early signs of illness.

Biosecurity: quarantine new arrivals for at least two weeks to reduce risk of introducing illness.

Vaccination: if respiratory disease is a persistent problem on your farm, please speak to us about whether a vaccination regime could alleviate this. For some conditions, vaccinations are recommended in the face of an outbreak

Take-Home Message

Pneumonia is a multifactorial disease, but with the right combination of environment, nutrition, vaccination, and vigilant care, the risks can be greatly reduced. Prevention protects animal welfare and saves time and money in the long term.

If you suspect pneumonia or see any of these signs please call us on 01328 864444