



Vet Steve Borsberry, from Warwick-based 608 XL Farm Animal Veterinary Surgeons, shares some tips on disease prevention and tackling health problems in dairy herds, drawing from his many years of on-farm experience. Here he takes a closer look at a fungal disease that can pass from cattle to humans.

Itchy condition can impact on dairy productivity

Fungal foe

It's an unsightly problem and presents a zoonotic risk. And, contrary to popular belief, it can also impact on productivity if it's severe enough. So ringworm shouldn't be ignored, particularly because it's relatively difficult to treat.

Ringworm is one of the most common skin diseases in cattle. It is a transmissible infectious skin disease, most often caused by *Trichophyton verrucosum*, and it can pass between species. The incubation period is around one week.

It is spread by direct and indirect contact. The fungal spores can survive in wood – fences, gates and hurdles – for many years. Most commonly seen are circular lesions, which are around 3cm in diameter and typically found on the head and neck. It's seen more commonly in calves, but can occur in adult cattle. I have also seen it on udders. It's an itchy condition, so calves and cattle will rub and scratch against posts and barriers.

If the infection is severe enough, it can have a significant impact on productivity. In adult cows it can result in a drop in milk yield, if the irritation caused by the disease is enough to reduce dry matter intakes. If cows' or calves' immune systems are challenged due to other diseases or health issues, such as pneumonia or BVD, this can make them more susceptible to ringworm. So if you have a sudden outbreak of the ringworm it could signify a more serious underlying health challenge.

And hanging holly in cattle building will do nothing to protect livestock from the disease. That's just an old wives' tale.



The encyclopaedia **Ringworm (*Trichophyton verrucosum*)**

Cause

Ringworm is caused by a spore-forming fungus, typically *Trichophyton verrucosum*. The spores can remain alive for many years in a dry environment. Direct contact with infected animals is the most common method of spreading the infection.

Symptoms

Forms grey-white circular areas of skin, with an ash-like surface that's also slightly raised. They're most common around the eyes, ears and the backs of calves. In adult cattle the chest and legs are more typical sites of infection.

Treatment

Without treatment ringworm will usually heal itself, but this can take several months. Topical treatment – application of the medication directly onto the lesion – is one way to tackle the disease. But any medication used cannot penetrate the 'crusts', so these should be removed beforehand by scraping or brushing. They should be collected and burned to avoid further contamination. Lesions should be topically treated at least twice.

Prevention

Effective control will only occur if housing is cleaned and disinfected, because this is where the fungi like to hide. Reducing the stocking rate density, and therefore direct contact, as well as increased exposure to sunlight and keeping housing as dry as possible will also help to halt the spread of the disease.

