

Is summer mastitis an issue on your farm?

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WHILE we may not be able to predict what the British weather will do, we can be in little doubt summer mastitis cases will follow the arrival of warmer weather. It is estimated it affects 40-45 per cent of dairy herds, with the average case costing in excess of £270.

The condition is spread by flies and affects dry cows, heifers, calves and even bulls. Typically, cases occur from June to September. Affected animals are often dull, inappetent and isolated from the rest of the group. They are likely to have a raised temperature, with an obvious swelling to one or more affected quarters. Some animals may be lame with visible swelling to the hind legs.

Infected quarters are found to contain a foul smelling yellow secretion, clots may be present and a blood tinged appearance is not uncommon. Left untreated, abortion and even death may follow.

Treatment centres round the use of antibiotics to combat infection, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories to reduce swelling and temperature. Regular stripping of the affected quarter is helpful, but strippings should be discarded carefully as they are a source of infection.

Unfortunately, many quarters fail to recover following infection. Many of you will be familiar with the frustration experienced when a heifer calves down with a light or indeed dead quarter. A significant proportion of these heifers are likely to have suffered from a degree of summer mastitis at some time.

Dry cow antibiotics play an important role in prevention.



While this is common practice at drying off, in-calf and maiden heifers are rarely treated. Ensure any dry cow tube therapy is active for sufficient time. Re-infusion is an option. If this is practised it is important it is done hygienically, to avoid further mastitis incidents. You must ensure the correct milk withdrawal periods are observed.

Good fly control can reduce the incidence of summer mastitis. Long acting pour-ons or impregnated ear tags should be used. Pastures with sandy soils, tree cover and water should be avoided. At times it may be necessary to house animals.

Any animals with visible teat lesions should be treated and covered with fly protection. It may be necessary to isolate these animals from the rest of the group. To reduce the risk of skin lesions, areas of rough grazing (thistles and long grasses) should be avoided.

The use of silicone teat sealants can help control summer mastitis, and is preferential to alternatives such as Stockholm tar and taping.

If preventative measures fail to control it on your farm, consider altering your calving pattern to avoid the high risk period. For some, this is the only way of breaking the cycle.

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