



HEALTHIER HERD HEALTHIER PROFITS

An educational initiative brought to you by MSD Animal Health working with the UK's farm vets

Part Four: Protecting beef cattle from IBR

Published exclusively in:
Farmers Guardian DAIRY

Assessing disease risk and designing a farm specific herd health programme is essential to protect all beef herds against the effects of IBR.

Farm specific herd health plan helps in fight against IBR

Establishing herd infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR) status and farm-specific risk factors should be a priority for any beef farm looking to protect health and performance in all ages of stock.

The highly contagious nature of IBR, along with widespread and varying signs of the disease, means exposure at any level can have severe implications to both adult and young cattle.

Caused by bovine herpesvirus, BHV-1, the signs of IBR include respiratory problems in the upper respiratory tract. This can show as fever, coughing and discharge from the nose and eyes in both adult and young cattle, with the virus often adding to the weight of young-stock pneumonia problems.

BHV-1 can also cause embryonic losses and fertility problems.

In general, all these signs are collated together and talked about under the umbrella of IBR.

BHV-1 can be spread via close nose-to-nose contact and potentially via bull semen. Once infected, an animal has the potential to become a latent carrier and spread the virus in times of stress, explains vet Andrew Biggs, of the Vale Vet Group.

Persistent

He says: "IBR is very persistent and has the potential to flare up at a later date in these latently infected cows. Reactivation and virus shedding could be brought on by any stressful event such as calving or bad weather."

This could cause a resurgence in problems in a herd or could introduce the problem to a naive herd.

Yorkshire vet Jonathan Statham, of Bishopton Vet Group, says IBR can cause particular problems at autumn housing when calves are weaned.

"The stress of weaning can add to disease spread risk. You have also got the added risk of warm conditions at housing with animals in close proximity. It only takes one infectious animal to spread IBR to that whole group," he says.

Producers can commonly see severe pneumonia outbreaks leading to high treatment costs and mortality. Signs include clear, runny noses leading to thick snot within a week. However the underlying sub-clinical effects can be even more dramatic.

"Infection can reduce feed conversion efficiency and affect calf growth rates. You can still have grumbling infection which



The contagious nature of IBR means exposure can have severe implications to both adult and young cattle.

causes damage to the respiratory tract without clinical signs."

Infected breeding animals can also experience fertility issues such as abortion and embryonic losses. That could reduce the calf crop for that year, or mean a cow takes longer to get in-calf, leading to reduced calf weights and a greater chance she will be culled.

Mr Statham says it is important to establish the disease status of a breeding herd and design a

bespoke herd health plan with your vet. Whether vaccination is appropriate in youngstock and/or cows should be decided after establishing herd risk factors. The decision may be made to vaccinate calves at weaning depending on individual farm situation.

"To check your status, carry out a youngstock check on a sample of animals over eight months old. If bloods test positive, it suggests IBR is currently circulating," he says.

Biosecurity

"When the test is negative, it makes boundary repair and biosecurity even more important to ensure you do not introduce IBR. If you do introduce one IBR positive animal to a naive herd it can result in a massive disease outbreak."

In a naive herd, remaining closed is preferential. However, on all systems, if you have to buy-in, ensure it is from a herd of known disease status.

Exposure to the disease could lead to reduced bull fertility, while the fact IBR can be spread via semen also means it is important to include stock bulls in any herd health policy. Knowing the IBR status of the breeding herd is crucial to protect both cows and bulls from infection.

Also check bull catalogues for the IBR status of AI bulls so you do not inadvertently introduce the disease through AI.

When store cattle are being bought-in from multiple sources

IBR explained

- Caused by bovine herpesvirus and spread mainly by nose-to-nose contact and potentially bull semen
- Once infected, cows can become latent carriers for life and can shed the disease when stressed
- Clinical signs include runny noses, pneumonia, loss of appetite and high temperature
- Good biosecurity is key to protecting your herd and preventing spread. Vaccination can help protect naive animals
- A marker vaccine is available to distinguish vaccinated and naturally infected herds

Case study: Ben Graham, Thirsk, North Yorkshire

VACCINATING against IBR is part of an overall strategy to maintain calf growth rates and a tight calving pattern in the herd of spring calving, dairy cross Hereford suckler cows managed by Ben Graham.

When Mr Graham took on the contract farming arrangement three years ago, establishing herd health status and protecting stock against disease was a high priority.

"Profit relies heavily on a tight calving pattern so you do not have different ages of stock. It is also important to protect calves against pneumonia and encourage good growth rates," he says.

"We sell bulls as stores at eight to nine months old so we want a strong, healthy, big calf going through the ring. We want



Establishing herd health status is key for herd manager Ben Graham.

our calves to be trouble-free as this means we get repeat buyers the next year."

Initial blood tests showed exposure to IBR, leptospirosis and BVD, and consequently a vac-

ination programme for all three diseases has been implemented.

In discussion with vet Jonathan Statham, the decision was made to vaccinate bull calves intranasally, three weeks

before weaning Bovilis® IBR Marker Live.

Weaning on this farm was shown to be a risk factor for disease spread and in the past, Mr Graham had experienced problems with pneumonia and high treatment costs.

"We wean and house at the same time so there is a lot of pressure on calves at this time and it does not take much to push them over. Since vaccinating, we see very few problems," he says.

To reduce pressure on live-stock, Mr Graham prioritises the best ventilated sheds for weaned calves and ensures low stocking rates at this stage. He also aims to source bulls of high health status, but ensures they are all vaccinated for IBR and fertility tested.

This information was provided by MSD Animal Health, makers of Bovilis® BVD, Bovilis® IBR Marker Live, Bovilis® IBR Marker Inac and Leptavoid™-H. Always use medicines responsibly.

Further information is available from MSD Animal Health, Walton Manor, Walton, Milton Keynes MK7 7AJ.
T: 01908 685 685 F: 01865 685 555 E: vet-support.uk@merck.com W: www.msd-animal-health.co.uk

