

# Winter calf HEALTH

with MSD Animal Health

The second article in this MSD-sponsored series on winter health examines the tell-tale signs of pneumonia and vets Walker Miller and Matthew Pugh discuss the treatment options available.

## Treat pneumonia promptly to reduce risk of lung damage



Matthew Pugh advises isolating affected animals in a separate air space to help reduce potential transmission to other cattle.

### Symptoms to look out for

- » Coughing and a lack of appetite
- » Mucus running from the nose and eyes and listlessness
- » Rapid breathing and signs of sweating
- » Rectal temperatures above 39degC

Cases of bacterial and viral pneumonia in housed calves have increased by around 20 per cent this year, according to vet Walker Miller. Mr Miller, a partner in the Academy Vet Centre, Stranraer, Wigtownshire, says this is in comparison to a 'normal year' in his own practice.

He says the number of young animals with pneumonia, which can be directly linked to lungworm, has risen by as much as 30 per cent. While older cattle can succumb to pneumonia, calves born this year run the greatest risk of catching the disease, he explains.

"The mild, wet climate is largely responsible for the sharp rise in the incidence of pneumonia. Bacteria and viruses thrive in a warm, damp environment. The weather has also been good

for lungworm larvae, which have flourished because of the high rainfall we experienced over the summer.

"One of my clients, who has never had a problem with pneumonia before, has lost three cattle to the disease during this housing period, with several others becoming seriously ill. Nothing has changed with the management of these cattle, compared with other years, which gives a strong indication that the weather is to blame."

### Intervention

He says once young cattle have been infected, it is a race against time to treat the symptoms. Prompt intervention will reduce the likelihood of permanent lung damage, which will affect lifetime health and reduce growth rates. In cases where an early diagnosis has been made, mortality can be kept as low as 2-3 per cent.

"One of the first indications of pneumonia is coughing. Another symptom is lack of appetite; it is better to have a system of feeding housed youngstock on a daily basis, because it will be immediately noticeable if they go off their feed. Intakes are not so easy to monitor if they are fed from a large hopper which holds enough food for several days."

Other symptoms include mucus running from the nose and eyes and listlessness, says Mr Miller. The calves may also be breathing rapidly and there may be signs of sweating, although healthy cattle may also sweat through the winter, during mild and humid spells.

Sick animals will be breathing rapidly and emitting a 'rattling'

### Dealing with pneumonia on farm

» Once pneumonia has been diagnosed, affected animals should be isolated if at all possible, advises Matthew Pugh, a director of Belmont Veterinary Centre in Hereford.

Ideally, he says they should be moved to a separate air space, away from other cattle which are potentially at risk. The next best option is to take them away from direct contact with other

calves, he advises. "Separating sick calves makes it easier to monitor their feed intake and observe their response to treatment, improving their chance of recovery. Sick calves are also highly infectious, so taking them away from the main group will reduce the potential for the transmission of disease to healthy animals."

Antibiotics and anti-inflammatory

medicines are the most effective way to treat pneumonia, as they help to protect a sick calf against permanent lung damage and speed up recovery, says Mr Pugh. He reports that while his practice has not seen a rise in cases of pneumonia, this winter is a particularly high-risk period.

"This season, we have added complications because some of the

straw is still damp, the air has been humid and feed prices have rocketed. There might be a temptation to save money on straw quantity or quality and possibly cut corners, when it comes to choosing feedstuffs. However this reaction will place the calf under increased pressure, making it more vulnerable to disease challenge," says Mr Pugh.

### Treating calves for pneumonia

» Act quickly at the first sign of pneumonia. Talk to your vet about combination disease treatment to deliver antibiotic and anti-inflammatory treatment rapidly via a single injection. Resflor will kill bacteria fast, as well as limiting the pain, inflammation and permanent lung damage, which can compromise future animal performance

» If a high number of calves are

showing clinical signs of pneumonia, the disease pressure in a pen may be very high for a significant period of time. Pneumonia can keep costing you again, again and again.

Talk to your vet about treating both sick and in contact animals with a long acting antibiotic. Zuprevo works fast, but also works longer in the lungs (28 days) than any other macrolide antibiotic currently on the market



### Identifying the type of virus or bacteria involved can help with determining the best treatment

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sound, while their flanks may appear sunken. Rectal temperatures should be taken from any suspect cases and a figure of 39degC or above should sound the alarm, as the temperature of a healthy calf is around 38degC.

### Lung wash

The farm vet's immediate reaction will be to take nasal swabs or carry out a lung wash, which involves inserting fluid in the lungs and harvesting the material which is 'washed' out. The

results should be available within a short time. Blood sampling will also reveal possible pneumonia infection, but results usually take longer to turn around, says Mr Miller.

"Testing is important, because identifying the type of virus or bacteria involved can help with determining the best treatment. It will also highlight whether lungworm is responsible for causing the problem. If deaths do occur, lung tissue can be sent in for further sampling," says Mr Miller.

Always use medicines responsibly. Resflor (PDM-V) and Zuprevo solution for injection of cattle (PDM-V) are available from your veterinary surgeon, from whom advice should be sought.

Zuprevo contains tildipirosin and Resflor contains florfenicol and flunixin (as flunixin meglumine).

Further information is available from MSD Animal Health, Walton Manor, Walton, Milton Keynes MK7 7AJ.

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