

Reduce the chance of pneumonia in calves

THERE are several ways farmers can help reduce the chances of their calves getting pneumonia.

How do I avoid getting pneumonia in my calves this year?

I had a bad pneumonia problem last year – how do I avoid it happening again?

Pneumonia is complex and multifactorial. Prevention requires consideration of all of the contributing factors, not just the infectious ones.

Which factors are most important?

Whether an individual or a group gets pneumonia, or not, depends on the interaction of four variables: 1 individual susceptibility; 2 management; 3 environment; 4 infectious agents.

Why are some calves more susceptible than others?

Susceptibility varies slight-

NORTHERN FARMER VET

John Macfarlane BVM&S, MRCVS, of Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group, advises about preventing pneumonia in calves

ly between breeds.

Continental breeds have a lower lung volume per kilogramme of body mass than native breeds, making them more at risk. Some individuals are more easily stressed and male calves, particularly entire males, are more susceptible. Also, our management may influence the likelihood of pneumonia.

How can my management help reduce the problem?

Firstly, address the fundamentals – oxygen, water and food. It's obvious that clean air is crucial. However, plentiful clean water allows the calf to produce enough saliva to buffer acidosis that would otherwise impair the

immune system.

Good nutrition always promotes health but, particularly in the newly-weaned housed calf, a ration of grass and cow's milk is replaced with conserved fodder and concentrates. The overall energy content of the feed must not be allowed to drop suddenly or there will be a growth check and increased susceptibility to disease.

Wean onto an energy-rich ration to avoid this. Make sure they have good levels of trace elements too – selenium, copper and iodine.

Avoid overcrowding and mixing age groups at housing. Separate stressful activities as much as possible – give long-acting wormers

and vaccines (both doses, where appropriate) at least two weeks before housing. If a fluke treatment is necessary you may have to delay it until after housing.

Introduce the winter ration as a creep feed before housing. You might be able to leave weaning until a couple of weeks after housing. Leave castration and dehorning until they've been in for a month.

You mentioned environment – what can I do about that?

A dry field and good access to water and any creep feed are the best you can do pre-housing. Prepare the winter accommodation to provide clean air, optimum humidity and freedom from draughts.

This is achieved by reviewing the ventilation (calculate floor space, inlet and outlet areas), by fixing leaks (roofs, gutters, downpipes and drains), by providing good bedding and by providing solid walls to above calf level.



ADVICE OFFERED: John Macfarlane of Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group

What if, after all this, I still get pneumonia this year?

Identify the problem early and check the extent by taking temperatures of the rest of the group.

Get your vet to take samples (nasopharyngeal swabs and lung washes taken straight to the lab) and treat aggressively from the outset.

Lab results and previous experience will guide antibi-

otic selection, which should be supplemented with anti-inflammatories and other supportive treatments.

If more than 15 per cent have a fever, treat the whole group.

Advances in diagnostics and treatments, and consideration of all contributing factors mean that the impact of pneumonia need not be as serious as it once was.

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Worm resistance in sheep discussed

by Mike Bridgen

THE problem of anthelmintic resistance in sheep was the topic of a meeting in Leyburn.

Dale & Vale vets held the event at Tennants' auction rooms to coincide with the launch of the UK's first dual-active sheep wormer from Pfizer.

Anthelmintic resistance – the ability of a parasite to survive a normally effective dose of anthelmintic – is one of the biggest challenges facing the UK sheep sector.

Resistance to benzimidazoles (white), levamisole (yellow) and macrocyclic lactones (clear) drenches has been found in flocks throughout the UK, but many farmers remain unaware of resistance in their flocks, with lost production and poor growth rates.

The first step on many farms is to identify resistance

status. Faecal egg counts carried out before and after drenching can help determine which drenches are working effectively.

Farmers regularly using faecal egg counts use less drench and reduce selection for resistant worms by worming only when necessary.

Adult sheep are more resistant to worms and carry much lower worm burdens than lambs.

They may only require dosing around lambing time to combat the peri-parturient rise when their resistance is lowered.

Even then it is important to leave some untreated, such as those with single lambs. This ensures that some susceptible worms survive on farm.

It is now clear that the traditional practice of dosing and moving on to clean pasture speeds up selection for resistant worms and is not to be encouraged.

Pfizer's new product contains two compounds, abamectin (a macrocyclic lactone) and derquantel a completely novel group.

If one of the drugs in a dual-active product fails to kill all worms, the second drug will kill those remaining. This delays the development of anthelmintic resistance, maintaining the efficacy of the constituent anthelmintic groups.

It was clear to all at the meeting that the use of all anthelmintics, including dual-active wormers, in accordance with SCOPS guidelines, should form part of any sheep farmer's flock health plan – based on a strategy tailored to his or her farm and formulated with a veterinary surgeon.

Dale & Vale Vets is an alliance of six independent veterinary practices in the Yorkshire Dales, Vale of York and South Durham areas.