

What should I do if my cow aborts?



SUCCESSFUL BIRTH: A cow and her healthy calf in hay

COW ABORTIONS

Chris Bailey, of Kingsway Veterinary Group, looks at ways of avoiding and dealing with cow abortions

IT'S bad enough when ewes abort but worse now my cows are – what's going on?

What is an abortion?

An abortion is normally classed as a cow losing a calf between days 50 and 270 of gestation with the calf either being born dead or living for less than 24 hours. Most early abortions tend to go undetected until the cow fails to calve, or returns to heat, so abortion rates (number of cases per 100 cows per year) are usually calculated on those seen, that is from day 120 onwards.

When should I worry about the number of abortions?

Most herds have an abortion rate of about one to two per cent so after a single abortion

there is no need to panic. However, an annual rate of greater than five per cent or a group of cows aborting over a short period of time is worth investigating further.

I have a cow that has had an abortion what should I do next?

The first thing to do after any abortion is implement good hygiene and ensure that any aborted material is removed and disposed of quickly. The removal and disposal of aborted material is

particularly important if Neospora is suspected. Neospora caninum is a parasite that causes abortion. An important route of infection involves farm dogs and foxes eating infected aborted material.

Once infected with Neospora these dogs will go on to shed eggs in their faeces which then infect other cattle. It is important to disinfect the calving area of an aborting cow and isolate the affected cow, especially from other cows that may be pregnant.

Do I legally have to contact anyone?

Great Britain is officially free of Brucella. However, for ongoing surveillance purposes, all abortions in the UK must legally be reported to the Animal and Plant Health agency (APHA) on 03000 200 301 who will then decide whether testing for brucellosis is required.

In dairy herds, this will generally only be if the history indicates an increased risk of brucellosis, such as multiple abortions occurring within 30 days, or abortions in imported cattle. Defra pays for the veterinary visits and the tests for any brucellosis investigations, but any additional testing is

not covered and is a private matter between the vet and farmer.

Are all causes of abortions infectious?

Abortion can be caused by non-infectious causes such as mycotoxins in the diet, certain medicines, high temperatures of whatever cause, eg non-specific infections and, finally, specific infectious causes. Infectious causes of abortion are more likely to be involved in abortion storms. Non-infectious causes can, however, be responsible for outbreaks of abortion, such as mycotoxin contamination of feed.

What are the common infectious causes?

Some of the most common infectious agents are Neospora, Leptospirosis, BVD, IBR, and Salmonella, although other infectious causes do exist.

How can I further investigate the cause of abortion?

If you are worried about the number of abortions your cows are experiencing, it is important to contact your vet. If your vet suspects an infectious cause of abortion, it is likely they will need to take samples from the aborted calf and placenta to send to a laboratory for further testing. They may blood test the cow to look for evidence of exposure to the key infectious agents.

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