



Vet Steve Borsberry, from the Solihull-based 608 XLVet Group in the West Midlands, shares some tips on disease prevention and tackling health problems in dairy herds, drawing from his many years of on-farm experience. Here he takes a closer look at a problem that can occur in early lactation.

Steve Borsberry: "It is possible that innate immunity is weaker in Holsteins"

Check and treat early

Have you ever wondered why cows calving in spotless calving pens still develop endometritis? Clean and well-bedded facilities are a good start, but there's more to preventing this costly disease than good hygiene.

Recent research has pinpointed cow breed as a factor in whether a cow develops an infection – or not – be it acute metritis or chronic endometritis (also known as whites), which is usually seen three weeks after calving. And transition cow management has a huge role to play too

The genetic or 'breed' factor is linked to innate immunity. This is the immunity that the cow inherits, or what it's born with. And it appears that this innate immunity is possibly weaker in Holsteins.

This could go some way to explaining why they seem to be more prone to the disease – even when management both at and around calving is good.

The negative energy balance experienced by cows – particularly

Holstein cows – after calving compounds this immunity issue. And could also go some way to explaining why Holstein pregnancy rates are falling by between 0.5 and 1% each year, despite continued efforts by producers to improve herd management.

Cows and heifers that experience difficult calvings or have retained cleansings are more prone to endometritis. Couple that with an excessive loss of body condition – in other words a serious negative energy balance post calving – then you're looking at the perfect recipe for infection.

The infection is caused by an E coli bacteria and makes the womb more susceptible to other bacterial and viral infections.

These infections damage the lining of the womb and have a massive impact on cow fertility. The onset of oestrus can be delayed. And bulling or oestrus, if seen at all, can be weak.



The encyclopaedia **Endometritis**

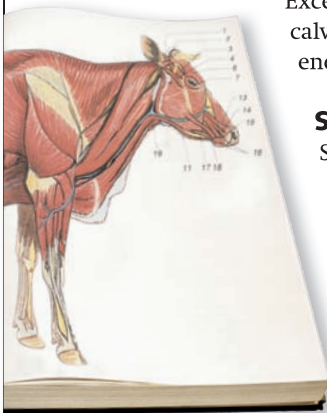
Causes

Bacterial or viral. Cows with retained cleansings are more susceptible, as are those that experience stress at calving.

Excessive body condition score loss post calving, caused by an extended negative energy balance, can also be a factor.

Symptoms

Sometimes there's a vulval discharge, but endometritis may not be picked up until cows are examined for failure to come into oestrus. Cows may also show signs of oestrus but fail to get pregnant, since the quality of the follicles and resulting ovum are impaired by the infection.



Diagnosis

Vet examination will pick up inflammation of the womb.

Prevention

Clean calving pens and good dry and transition cow management are all vital. Producers should keep an eye on cows that retain cleansings, abort or have difficult calvings. Cows should be examined routinely for discharge, which is an indicator of whites or metritis.

Treatment

Early detection and treatment is vital. There are two options, either inject prostaglandin to bring the cow bulling, which will help expel infection from the womb, or wash out the womb with Metricure and simply carry on treating until the infection clears up. But in some cows the infection never clears up.