



Cattle vet Debby Brown, from Barnard Castle-based Castle Vets, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues that are affecting dairy herds across the UK. Here she explains why now is a crucial time to think about vaccinating young and bought-in stock against lungworm.

Vaccinate young and bought-in stock prior to first grazing season

Protect naïve grazing stock

Now is the time to be thinking about lungworm or husk, even though late summer is when the parasite usually becomes a problem. In the most severe cases it can be fatal. Cattle can die as a result of an acute allergic reaction to the parasite living in their lungs. Other symptoms include coughing and producers report cows and heifers that are losing condition and performing poorly – in terms of both production and fertility. And at this point it's almost too late. Much of the damage to the animal's lungs – and the producer's pocket – has been done. So, as with so many diseases and conditions, prevention is the best option.

Young stock should be focus of producers' attention as they're most susceptible to the disease. Once cattle have been exposed to the parasite they develop some immunity and so a degree of exposure is important. The timing of vaccination is critical. Two doses must be given – one month apart – to young and bought-in stock. And the second dose should ideally be given two weeks prior to turnout. It's a live vaccination so it's important to only dose animals on farms where there's a known problem.

For all other producers, it's something to watch out for. And remember it's a real and serious threat. One Durham-based producer lost three heifers, out of a batch of 12 that he'd bought in, in summer 2009. He didn't vaccinate them before turnout. But now routine vaccination against lungworm forms part of his herd's health plan.



The encyclopaedia **Lungworm (husk)**

Causes

Parasite – the roundworm. The adults are white thread-like worms that live in the air passages leading to the lungs. Female worms produce eggs that contain a first stage larva and these are coughed up with mucus and swallowed. The larva emerges from the egg in the gut and leaves the body in the faeces, where development to the infective third stage larva takes place.

Symptoms

Coughing, body condition loss and poor performance. Fatal in severe cases.

Diagnosis

Relatively easy to diagnose due to coughing. Can also blood sample to see if cattle have been exposed.

Prevention

Vaccination, timed well to ensure some exposure to allow cattle build their own immunity to the parasite. Bolus treatments are available. Two-dose treatment with live vaccine, prior to turnout, preferable as a degree of exposure helps animal to develop immunity.

Treatment

Worm infected cattle immediately to kill the parasite – speed is the key as after treatment coughing may worsen for between 24 and 48 hours. Administering anti-inflammatories can help to ease coughing and lung inflammation while the treatment takes effect.

