



Cattle vet Debby Brown, from the Barnard Castle-based Castle Vet Group, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues that are affecting dairy herds across the UK. Here she takes a close look at a problem that's been seen earlier than usual on units this year – summer mastitis.

Take proactive steps to protect dry and young stock from infection

# Udders under attack

**S**ummer mastitis was seen a little earlier than usual this year, due to the unusually warm weather in May. Some cases were picked up on dairy units in late June. Although it's more common in late July and August, it can occur between June and September.

Typical symptoms in grazing dry cows and young stock will be lameness and looking unwell. Infected animals will be stiff and move gingerly as their udders are sore. Closer inspection will reveal swollen udders and teats and, if not caught in the early stages, the udder may also be hard and 'smelly'. Cattle may also have a high temperature. Speed is the key when treating summer mastitis. Just 48 hours after infection you can be looking at a pretty sick cow.

Failure to spot and treat can result in, at worst, dead stock and, at best, permanently lost quarters. With two or more infected quarters, a cow will be a cull once she's over the infection. Time checking your stock every day is well spent.

The good news is that the bacteria that causes this infection – *Actinomyces pyogenes* – is sensitive to the most basic antibiotics and in that sense it's easy to treat. What's not so easy is getting the antibiotic to the site of infection in the udder.

Ideally an anti-inflammatory should be administered at the same time as the antibiotic. This will help to reduce tissue swelling and help the antibiotic to reach the infected area and reduce the amount of scar tissue once the infection clears up.

Getting a vet to administer the treatment can help since they can inject into the vein, which again speeds up and improves transit of the drugs around the body and to the udder.



## The encyclopaedia **Summer mastitis**

### Cause

Bacterial infection of the udder spread by biting flies.

### Symptoms/diagnosis

Cow appears unwell, displaying lameness and stiffness, caused by sore udder. Progresses to hard, swollen and 'smelly' udder, accompanied by high temperature. In severe and well-established cases, udder can become gangrenous and drop off.

### Treatment

Antibiotics and anti-inflammatories should be administered as soon as possible. Speed is important

and cattle should be housed for treatment, not least because it's advisable to strip out the affected quarter to remove as much infection as possible. Stripping out can increase the chance of saving the quarter but, in the majority of summer mastitis cases, quarters are lost.

### Prevention

Avoid grazing young stock, dry cows and heifers close to water courses and wooded areas – anywhere that's a fly habitat. Flies also prefer sandy soils so, where possible, graze susceptible stock on heavier soils.

And take steps to keep flies away and prevent biting. Applying Stockholm tar to the udder every two weeks works. Fly tags and pour-on products can also help, but won't stop the flies from biting. A long-acting pour on can be applied close to the udder for extra protection. Use a gloved hand to carefully rub on just half the dose rate.

