



Cattle vet Debby Brown, from the Barnard Castle-based Cast Vet Group, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues that are affecting dairy herds across the UK. Here she tells us why IBR can be a particular threat to herds at this time of year.

Minimise stress and consider vaccination to control infectious virus

Watch out for IBR

Any time in the cow calendar that puts stress on the cow – such as calving – is a time when outbreaks of infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) are most likely to occur. And the re-housing period is no exception. Our practice sees more cases at this time of year as cows come back inside, when carriers of latent infection can ‘breakdown’ with the disease and can also pass it more easily to the rest of the herd as they’re all inside.

Symptoms to look out for, which are similar to pneumonia or respiratory disease, include runny noses and eyes and a temperature – and the loss of appetite and drop in milk yield that comes with that. It’s also common to see spontaneous abortion in dairy cows, due to high temperature.

IBR is pretty devastating, both in terms of lost production and fertility, and around 60% of our dairy clients, who know they have the virus in their herd, will vaccinate stock against it. Some vaccinate the milking herd and others jab their young



stock. Their vaccination programme depends very much on the individual herd situation, so it’s always best to consult your vet on the best course of action.

Unless you have a completely closed herd with good biosecurity – in other words your herd can’t come into contact with

any other cattle, even if it’s just nose-to-nose nuzzling over a fence – then IBR is a virus to watch out for. And if symptoms are such that IBR is suspected, then it’s important to get an accurate diagnosis from your vet before commencing treatment or any form of prevention programme.

The encyclopaedia **Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR)**

Cause

IBR is a virus. It’s easily passed between cattle and when animals recover they become latent carriers and can shed the virus and/or breakdown with the virus again at times of stress.

Symptoms

Similar to pneumonia or respiratory disease. May see running eyes and noses, as well as high temperature, loss of appetite and depressed milk yields. Some strains of the virus, seen in US herds but not the UK, can affect the cow’s nervous system and trembling and shaking can occur.

Treatment

Speedy diagnosis and treatment is vital. A long-acting antibiotic and a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug should be administered. Producers can also vaccinate in the face of an outbreak if they catch it early enough. Speak to your vet.

Prevention

Vaccination is the only way to prevent the spread of IBR if there are known carriers in the herd. Vaccinating cattle that have had the disease will help to prevent them shedding the virus, but it won’t prevent them from breakdown with the disease.

Vaccination should be carried out at least every 12 months. In herds with a severe IBR problem, it may be necessary to vaccinate every six months. Again, consult your vet.

