



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 look at an insidious disease that requires close attention.

It's vital to vaccinate if you have a naive herd

# Watch out for 'Trojans'

It's estimated that more than 90% of UK dairy herds have had exposure to Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD), so little wonder that it's a virus that most, if not all, producers have seen it in their herd. But it's not always easy to see. It's an insidious disease, often missed as symptoms can be attributed to other management or health factors.

A bulk milk test is the ideal way to monitor antibody levels in the herd. It allows producers to rule out BVD if they are seeing an increased susceptibility to other diseases and infections and it can act as early warning in naive herds, allowing producers to make a pre-emptive strike with vaccination if necessary – before the virus causes further damage to herd health, productivity and ultimately profitability.

Naive herds face the biggest threat because if and when it gets into the herd it spreads quickly – and quietly. Persistently infected (PI) calves can

be missed and allowed to spread the virus among the herd to devastating effect.

And then the most serious – and costly – symptoms of infection appear, which include dead or weak calves and miscarriages.

Producers should also watch out for 'Trojan horses' – cows in calf that have been infected but are not PIs.

They show no symptoms, but their calves can be born PIs. These will be weak and often die of respiratory disease.

A closed herd is not necessarily safe from picking up BVD. Because it's spread most easily through respiratory means, a cow leaning over a neighbouring herd's boundary fence can be all that it takes for a supposedly closed herd to become infected. Wildlife can also carry the disease.

When it comes to BVD, I don't believe that there's any such thing as a truly closed herd.



## The encyclopaedia **Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD)**

### Causes

The cause is a viral infection, easily passed from cow to cow or cow to calf. The main route of transmission is respiratory.



### Symptoms

Symptoms are not always easy to spot. Signs include reduced fertility, lower milk production and increased susceptibility to other infections, particularly in young calves.

Fertility 'symptoms' include reduced conception rates, early and late embryonic loss, abortion and weak/abnormal calves.

Any persistently infected (PI) calves will develop mucosal disease.

### Diagnosis

Milk bulk tank tests can offer a whole-herd picture. NML offers such a service and can use bulk milk samples already collected through the payment testing route. Any suspect cows and calves should be blood tested.

### Prevention

Bio-security, where practical and possible, will help. And vaccination is a must in naive herds where a threat or infected animal is identified. PIs must also be identified quickly and culled to prevent spread. Look out for the 'Trojan horse' – a cow in calf that shows no symptoms. She may be fine, but her calf could be a PI.

### Treatment

There is no treatment. All PIs must be culled and vaccination is the only way to protect the rest of the herd.