



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 painful eye condition.

## Watch closely to spot painful eye disease early

# The 'eyes' have it

**P**roducers should be vigilant for signs of New Forest Eye, or Pink Eye as it's sometimes known, all year round and not just when cattle are at grazing.

Infectious bovine keratoconjunctivitis can, contrary to popular belief, also occur at housing, although it is more common during the summer months, particularly in youngstock that are out a grass.

Young cattle – both beef and dairy – tend to be most susceptible to the disease. Indeed older cattle seem to have some level of immunity against this highly infectious disease, which is caused by a bacteria – *Moraxella bovis*.

It is mechanically spread, predominantly by flies, but I also believe that if cattle feed close together at the trough, flapping ears can transfer the disease from infected eyes to neighbouring animals.

And for this reason producers can sometimes see an epidemic even in the middle of winter when there are no flies around to spread it.

It's an extremely painful condition – infected cattle will look miserable – and it usually affects just one eye, but occasionally it can be both. I'm surprised that both eyes are not infected more often as it is such a contagious disease.

The condition starts off as an ulceration of the cornea and a watery, frequently blinking eye.

If left untreated it can cause severe changes in the cornea and can lead to blindness.



## The encyclopaedia **New Forest Eye**

### Cause

Bacterial infection (*Moraxella bovis*) spread by flies and other direct physical contact between cattle, such as ear flapping.

### Symptoms and diagnosis

It's essential to check cattle regularly for signs of the disease. Early signs are tear-streaked faces and partially closed eye lids. Animals may also blink excessively.

An ulcer will develop on the cornea. It's extremely painful and infected animals will look miserable.

### Treatment

Most antibiotics can be used

and if caught early treatment can be successful, in other words the animal's sight will be saved.

Antibiotic eye creams need to be applied between two and three times a day to be beneficial.

But the preferred method of treatment is an injection of antibiotic into the eyelid, which can be tricky.

Adequate restraint when carrying out this procedure is absolutely essential and it's not for the faint hearted. A NSAID can also be administered by injection to relieve any discomfort.

### Prevention

Fly control may go some way to helping to prevent the disease on units with a known problem.

And if producers know that particular fields tend to 'harbour' the disease then it's wise to avoid grazing youngstock on them.

