



Three cases of a rare and fatal condition Malignant Catarrhal Fever have been confirmed on three different farms in the south west. Synergy Farm Health's vet Alasdair Moffett explains why producers should be vigilant for signs of the disease.

Report symptoms to rule out Bluetongue and other notifiable diseases

## Rare-but-fatal disease

I have only seen two cases of Malignant Catarrhal Fever in eight years. So it was alarming to see a handful of cases in just one month this spring. The cows, all seen in separate herds, presented with high temperatures, lack of appetite, and painful and red eyes that developed a blueish colour across the cornea. Although extremely rare (fewer than 12 cows a year contract the virus) and not a notifiable disease, producers who see symptoms of Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF) in cattle should call their vet. The symptoms, which can also include mucus discharge and crusting of the nose, can look similar to Bluetongue, foot-and-mouth disease or a PI animal with BVD. So it's vital to determine the exact cause. NADIS has warned that there is a high risk that Bluetongue could be on its way to the UK from Europe as we move through the summer and into autumn, so it's important to rule this out if you see symptoms.

In the UK, MCF is spread only from sheep to cows. In each of the three cases reported, cattle had grazed a field previously occupied by sheep. Clinical signs in a cow can take up to a month to appear.

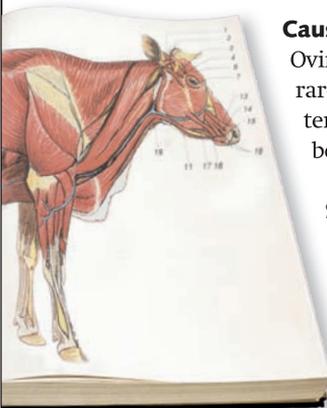
Infected cattle will also have swollen lymph nodes and cannot tolerate daylight. In the latter stages seizures may also occur, followed by death.

Early detection of the disease is important – if not for treatment then for welfare reasons. Some cattle will develop increasingly severe symptoms during a 10-day period. Others, with a more acute infection, may die within 24 hours.

The disease is not passed from cow to cow. However, it is difficult to treat and once confirmed the animal would typically be euthanised on welfare grounds because there's little chance of recovery. I have seen just one cow recover from MCF.



### The encyclopaedia **Malignant Catarrhal Fever**



#### Cause

Ovine Herpes Virus 2 (OHV-2). Extremely rare, but where cases do occur, they tend to be in herds where sheep have been overwintered on dairy grazing.

#### Symptoms

High temperature, poor appetite, dull and depressed, moderate dehydration, photophobia, blue discolouration to the cornea, mucus discharge from nose, and seizures.

#### Diagnosis

Blood testing live animals is vital because MCF symptoms can mimic those for Bluetongue, foot-and-mouth disease, BVD, severe IBR and listeria.

#### Treatment

There is no treatment and the fatality rate is 95%. Once confirmed, cattle are typically euthanised for welfare reasons.

#### Prevention

Difficult to prevent if sheep are overwintered on dairy grazing land. But cases are rare and typically isolated to one individual in the herd.