



Vet Ben Sapsford, from the Cumbria-based XLVet Westmorland Vet Group, shares some timely tips on disease prevention and tackling health problems in dairy herds. Here he takes a closer look at a hoof problem that's being seen in an increasing number of herds this winter.

Speed is vital to tackle a serious – and smelly – problem

Stop the rot!

Lameness is a serious issue in some herds this winter, not helped by a wet summer and tougher than usual conditions underfoot. Toe necrosis is also being seen for the first time in some herds. It's relatively unusual, but it's nasty and an extremely challenging condition to tackle.

Of the few cases seen so far this year, most have started with white-line disease. Infection then gets in and tracks down and along into the foot – right into the claw and the toe.

Infected feet smell foul and closer inspection will reveal blackened, rotting tissue with infection deep down in the pedal bone.

It's vital to call out the vet to deal with this. It's extremely painful and tricky to treat and it has to be done quickly and carefully. All the infected, rotten tissue in the foot, including any bone, has to be removed to leave an open and relatively clean lesion.

A local anaesthetic is required, as well as an intensive course of antibiotics to stop the infection from tracking any further. This could also help to reduce the chance of the infected toe from having to be amputated.

Successful treatment depends on how early the condition is caught. Intensive and prompt action is vital to avoid toe amputation, but that's often the outcome. In many cases the best course of action is to amputate the digit under regional anaesthesia

Prevention is as it is with all lameness issues – it's all about management and the environment. Reducing the chance of white-line disease, sole ulcers and other hoof lesions is the best way to avoid toe necrosis. These conditions are the precursors that allow the infection to get into the foot in the first place.



The encyclopaedia **Toe necrosis**



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The cause of toe necrosis is a bacterial infection that enters the foot through a hoof lesion, such as white-line disease or sole ulcer.

ymptoms

Severe lameness, particularly after treatment for a lesion that doesn't show improvement, often with a foul smell. Look for deep infection, possibly tracking down as deep as the pedal bone.

Treatment

Speed is important to limit the spread of infection. Rotten, infected tissue and bone must be removed under local anaesthetic by a vet and then the clean and open wound must be treated with antibiotic and packed to keep it clean and dry.

If healing is poor – sometimes the result, if infection is caught late – then complete toe amputation may be the outcome.

Prevention

Treat lesions promptly and thoroughly and keep a close eye on treated cows to monitor their recovery.