



Mastitis in freshly calved heifers is increasingly coming under the spotlight on many dairy units, according to Cornwall-based vet Phil Elkins, from Westpoint Farm Vets. Here he explains why and how to tackle it.

Take steps to improve hygiene and safeguard heifer immunity

# Avoid infection 'catalysts'

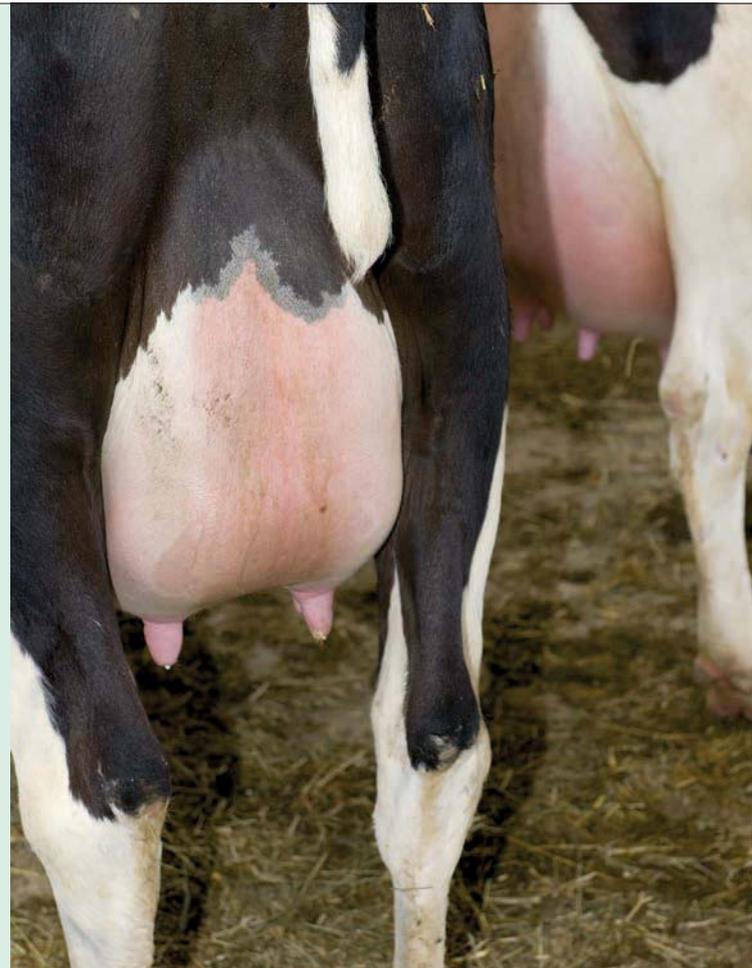
The number of cases of mastitis in freshly calved heifers is fairly static across our clients' herds, but it's more noticeable now that the 'back ground noise' of mastitis in older milking cows has been turned down. Mastitis in heifers, both clinical and sub-clinical, is now an area where we are looking to improve.

Bacteria responsible for mastitis in heifers are typically environmental, the most common being E coli and Strep Uberis. But it is really important to use diagnostics and consult with your vet to ensure that the correct treatment is being used for heifers with mastitis. Don't assume that the mastitis-causing pathogen is the same as that causing cases in older cows.

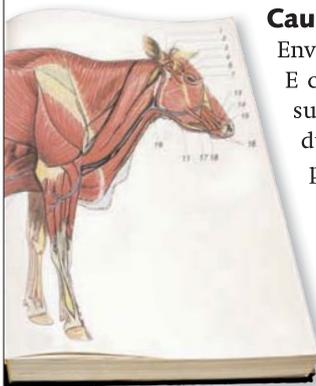
The catalyst to picking up infection in heifers is typically an event during the two weeks prior to, or a week to 10 days after, calving. Just before calving her immune system changes and as the heifer's udder 'bags up' it loses some of its natural antibacterial properties.

Post calving, when the calf suckles for the first time or colostrum is taken, the natural teat seals are broken, which also leaves the udder more prone to infection, as does milk leakage prior to calving. So a focus on hygiene is key. Keep pre-calvers, particularly their udders, as clean as possible. Housing should be bedded with fresh, dry straw.

Also keep stress to a minimum, as this can suppress immunity. Avoid mixing groups of heifers and drastic or rapid changes in their ration. Nutrition is also important and selenium, in particular, plays a key role in supporting the immune system. Selenium deficiency can be a problem in heifers.



## The encyclopaedia **Mastitis in freshly-calved heifers**



### Causes

Environmental pathogens, predominantly E coli and Strep Uberis, are the usual suspects. Heifers succumb to infection due to a dip in immunity in the pre-calving period, which can be exacerbated by stress.

### Symptoms

Typical signs of udder infection, including hot, inflamed and painful quarter/quarters, either with or without clots.

### Prevention

If there's a severe problem in the herd, ask your vet to test to see what pathogens are causing the problem and, in the short-term, discuss the possible use of therapy to help prevent cases. This approach is second to management, which must focus on hygiene, reducing stress to protect the immune system and nutrition. Using prophylactic antibiotics and/or teat sealants is a last resort.

### Treatment

Seek an accurate diagnosis as to the pathogen causing the mastitis so an appropriate and effective antibiotic treatment can be administered.