



Cattle vet Debby Brown, from the Barnard Castle-based Castle Vet Group, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues that are affecting dairy herds across the UK. Here she highlights the cost of calf pneumonia and gives some pointers on how to prevent this damaging disease and how best to treat sick calves.

Ensure that calf housing is dry, clean and draft-free

Good ventilation is vital

Calf pneumonia costs the UK dairy industry millions of pounds each year. Poorly ventilated housing is a key factor on many units, exacerbated by the pressure on buildings caused by expanding dairy herds.

At this time of year, any shortcomings in calf housing and management are readily exposed. Stocking rates may be higher than usual and this increases humidity, creating the perfect conditions for pneumonia-causing pathogens to survive and thrive.

Mixing calves of different ages can also increase the risk of pneumonia infection.

It's vital that calves are housed in groups according to age and that housing isn't over stocked – allow at least 13 cubic metres and two square metres of lying area per calf.

Where there's a known viral problem, vaccination may be the answer, but it must be targeted and not viewed as a panacea.

The success of vaccination will be limited in scenarios where calf housing and husbandry is less than ideal. And it certainly won't protect calves against bacterial pneumonia.

Pneumonia treatment should be swift, using antibiotics and a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID).

The former will tackle bacterial infection and protect calves with a viral infection against a secondary bacterial infection. The latter will reduce calf temperature and lung inflammation.

Prompt treatment with a NSAID will help to limit lung scarring and speed up recovery, making it more likely that the calf will reach its full potential.



The encyclopaedia **Calf pneumonia**

Causes

Either viral or bacterial infection and more likely to occur on units with poor calf house hygiene and ventilation, high levels of stress and immuno-suppressing diseases present in the herd, such as BVD.

Symptoms and diagnosis

Initial signs are a loss of appetite and a temperature, followed by listlessness, sunken eyes, laboured breathing and coughing.

The first symptom seen may be death if the infection is severe, as can be the case with viral pneumonia, such as RSV.

It's vital to seek veterinary

help to determine whether pneumonia is viral or bacterial as this will determine prevention and treatment protocols.

Prevention

Good husbandry is vital. Calves should be housed, according to age and at an appropriate stocking rate, in dry, clean and well ventilated accommodation.

There should be an air inlet of at least 0.05 square metres per calf and an outlet of at least four times this size.

Stress should be kept to a minimum and vaccination against viral pneumonia should be carried out where there is a known and severe problem.

Treatment

Sick calves should be isolated wherever possible. And they should be treated with antibiotics and a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID).

