



The approach to disease control for older calves prior to weaning is much the same as for younger calves, however as grazing increases they encounter new disease threats.

Weaning is a significant stressful event for most suckled calves and appropriate planning should be put in place to minimise the potential check on growth rates which can occur at this stage, as well as planning to minimise potential disease threats encountered after weaning.

DISEASE PRESSURES IN GROWING CALVES

As with younger calves, knowing what pathogens are present on farm is vital to inform control programmes. If deaths occur, it is essential to know what has caused them, so post mortem examinations should be carried out on all fallen stock if possible. In addition, losses that occur in this age group prior to weaning can often be related to chronic disease contracted as a young calf, or poor immunity due to Failure of Passive Transfer (see Calving and Neonatal Management sheet). Specific disease concerns in this age group include:

Parasites

As grazing increases, internal parasites like gastrointestinal worms and coccidia become a potential threat to growth rates, so faecal samples should be monitored for presence of parasite eggs to guide treatment requirements and prevention strategies.

Pneumonia

A recent AHDB fallen stock study showed that pneumonia was the major cause of death in suckled calves, with 25% of deaths attributed to this disease in calves aged < 6 months and 6-24 months.¹ In addition, reduced growth rates account for 40% of the costs of respiratory disease outbreaks (see Figure 1), so appropriate control measures must be in place to cover the entire growth period of calves on the farm. The same environmental control principles such as ventilation and moisture control apply as for young calves (see Young Calves - 24 hr to 42 days sheet). In older calves, additional considerations such as controlling dietary transitions, avoiding overstocking and minimising stress at weaning and housing need to be addressed. Effective vaccines are available to increase resistance to key viral, bacterial and parasitic causes of pneumonia. Appropriate vaccination programmes should be discussed with your vet.

Clostridial diseases

In the AHDB Fallen Stock study, in cattle 6-24 months of age, clostridial disease accounted for 17% of all losses, second only to pneumonia as a cause of death in this age group. Clostridial organisms survive in soil for many years and can also live in the gut of healthy cattle. When conditions are favourable, such as at sites of bruising or injury, or sudden dietary changes, rapid multiplication and release of toxins can occur which often result in fatal disease and significant financial loss.

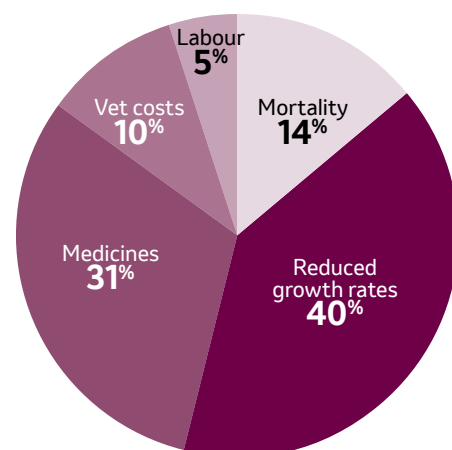


Figure 1: Costs of a pneumonia outbreak in a beef suckler herd.²

AIM: Regularly review diagnostic information regarding pathogens on farm and evaluate disease occurrence, treatment response and environmental factors which could impact on the disease pressures calves experience on farm.

Vaccination

Vaccines are used to prime a healthy animal's immune system to fight off disease and are available against many of the major pneumonia pathogens and major clostridial organisms. Vaccines are used as part of preventative health plans, which are invariably less costly, easier to manage and less stressful for both farmers and animals when compared with treatment of a disease outbreak.

To get the most out of the vaccines you use, here are a few tips to ensure correct use:

- Vaccinate at the right time, ahead of the anticipated disease challenge, i.e. if anticipating pneumonia challenge at housing, ensure any course of vaccination is completed at least 2 weeks prior to housing.
- Avoid vaccinating at stressful times or when animals are suffering disease, i.e. vaccination should not be performed at the same time as weaning, housing, transport, or castration/dehorning.
- Vaccines should be kept refrigerated at 2-8°C, protected from freezing, and some should not be exposed to light. Transport vaccines at the correct temperature and ensure your fridge is working correctly if vaccines are stored on farm.



AIM: Work with your vet and review product leaflets carefully to ensure you are using good vaccination techniques on your farm.

Stress

Some unavoidable management events are stressful for calves, but consideration should always be taken to minimise stress.

Examples of ways to minimise stress include:

- Appropriate use of pain relief for castration and dehorning.
- Minimising mixing of calves from different groups and maintaining tight age groups of calves.
- Ensuring any dietary transitions are smooth, such as gradual introduction of creep feeding, avoiding ruminal acidosis and managing energy and protein requirements pre- and post-weaning (see Nutrition sheet for further information).
- Ensuring adequate provision of feed space and water availability at housing.
- Avoiding overstocking and keeping group sizes manageable.
- Separating stressful events such as weaning and housing by at least 2 weeks.

AIM: Review the management events which could cause stress to your calves and identify ways to minimise stress.



References: 1. AHDB Fallen Stock Project (2015). 2. Andrews A (2000) Calf Pneumonia Costs! Cattle Practice 8 (2).

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UK-BOV-190700081