

## The significance of BVD in cattle herds

The BVD virus is a major problem for the industry. Risk factors include purchase of infected stock, contact with neighbours' cattle across fences or contact at markets or shows. Visitors who have direct contact with cattle from other farms, and the use of shared equipment can introduce the BVD virus to a previously clean herd.

If the BVD virus is circulating in a herd it can cause a number of health problems including:

- Reduced conception rates and an increased chance of embryonic death, leading to high numbers of barren cows;
- Protracted calving periods;
- Abortions;
- Stillbirths;
- Deformed and weak calves.
- Mucosal disease.

BVD infection leads to a suppression of disease resistance allowing calf pneumonia and diarrhoea problems to be more severe, resulting in greater calf losses.

If a cow is infected with the virus in the first third of pregnancy, this can result in the death of the developing calf, although surviving calves will remain infected for as long as they live. At birth such calves are 'persistently infected' and are known as PI animals. PI animals are an ongoing source of infection within the herd.

A PI heifer that survives to breeding age will produce PI offspring. Most adult PI animals – bulls and heifers - are infertile. Identifying and removing the PI animals in a herd is therefore a key priority.

Addressing the risk of disease should be discussed as part of herd health planning by farmers and their own vets, but these are some of the steps that could be considered.

- Discover whether BVD is active in the herd. Do this by screening some of the young stock, aged between nine and 18 months old.
- Have a biosecurity programme in place to prevent purchase of a virus carrier and prevent contact with other cattle, such as through boundary fences.
- Use BVD vaccine on all breeding animals if the herd is at high risk from contracting disease. If vaccinating, a screening test of calves is recommended annually.

HCC has also produced a farmer booklet, which contains a focus on BVD. For further information on this or the Farming Connect Red Meat Development Programme contact HCC on 01970 625050 or visit [www.hccmpw.org.uk](http://www.hccmpw.org.uk)



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