

PREVENTING AND TREATING CALF PNEUMONIA

The RUMA Targets Task Force has identified calf pneumonia as a key disease area in which to reduce the use of antibiotics. Preventing pneumonia taking hold is the best way of reducing antibiotic use.

Preventing pneumonia

Improving an individual animal's disease resistance through immunity-led prevention should be the primary focus to build a healthy herd on strong foundations. The development of immunity-led prevention starts with excellent colostrum management and continues with utilising a robust vaccination programme. This is then supported by ensuring the animal's nutrition, environment and management interactions (transport, weaning etc.) are all as good a standard as possible to minimise animal stress which can impact the immune system.

Use of vaccines

Vaccination is a cost-effective tool to help protect the herd against pneumonia by increasing individual calf's immunity and by reducing the amount of circulating pathogens in the environment.

Pneumonia vaccination has been shown to be associated with higher heifer weights at 8 months, as calves which were vaccinated weighed over 45kg more than those which were unvaccinated.¹

All calves in a group which share the same airspace should be vaccinated to maximise protection and, where possible, vaccination should take place before infection pressures increase (e.g. housing or transport) due to increased stress factors tipping the balance in favour of the pathogen. Many vaccines are available to protect against pneumonia and they are all different so getting the right one to protect the right ages, and against the right pathogens, is critical. Work with your vet to understand the pathogens on your farm, how they are impacting your stock and which is the best vaccination schedule for you.

Supporting the immune system

- Ensure stocking levels are in line with the following criteria:
 - » Animals below 150kg: 1.5m²
 - » Animals between 150-200kg: 2m²
 - » Animals over 200kg: 3m²
- Minimise the cooling impact of moisture by providing adequate, dry bedding which is replaced frequently. Sources of excess moisture should be maintained and causes of excess moisture removed from housing.
- Keep house humidity down by maintaining adequate ventilation (but without creating draughts; air speed should not exceed 0.2-0.5m/s as this would lead to performance limiting draughts).
- Keep calves within the thermo-neutral zone by providing plenty of bedding, calf jackets etc.

THERMO-NEUTRAL ZONE

NEWBORN CALF

15-20°C

ABOVE 3 WEEKS OLD

6-25°C

GROWING HEIFER

0-23°C

- Provide good nutrition.
- Ensure age groups are not widely mixed.
- Practise sound hygiene (i.e. cleaning and disinfection of pens and feeding equipment, work with younger animals before older ones etc.).
- Minimise stress when transporting or weaning calves.



Treating pneumonia

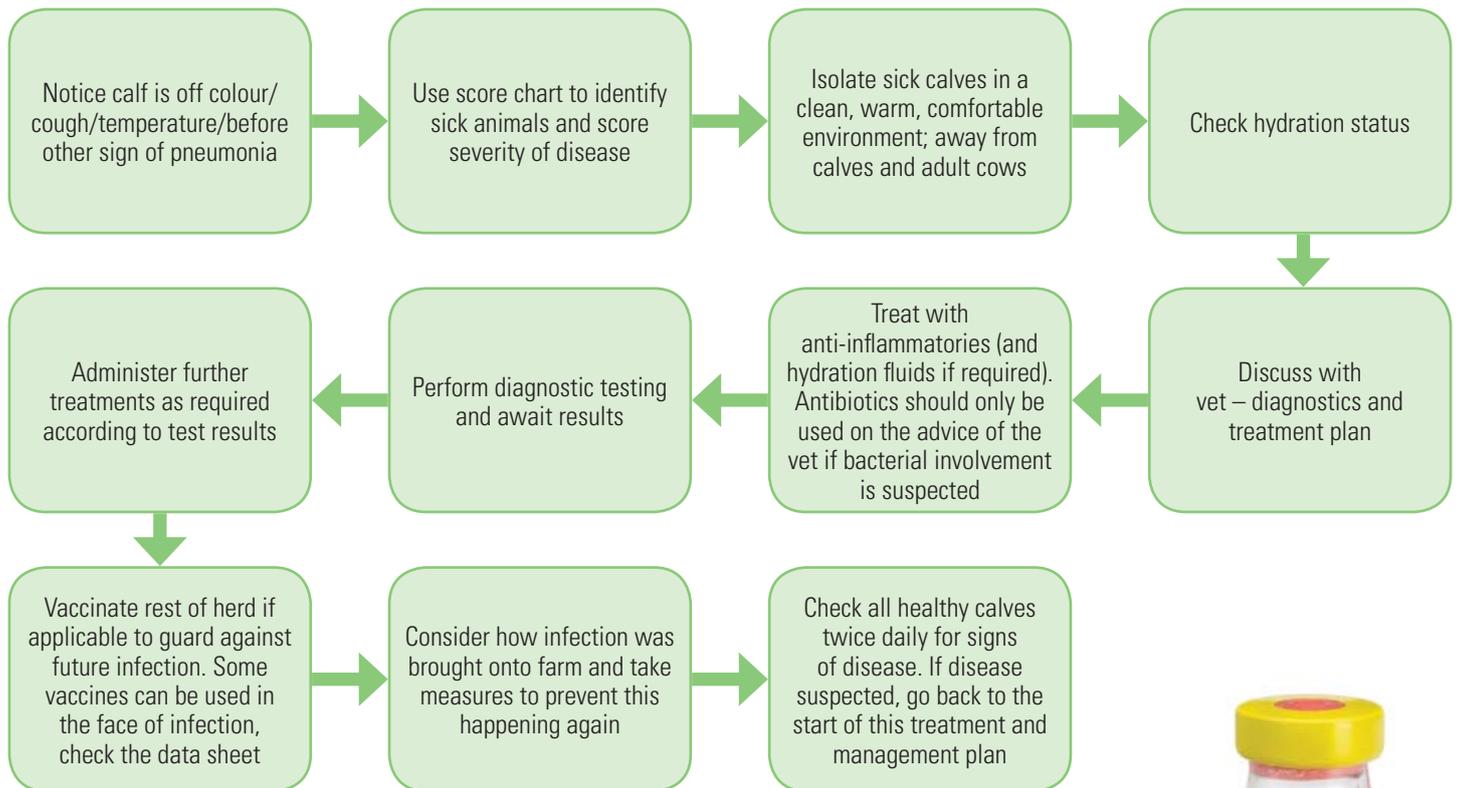
If you have an outbreak of pneumonia it is important that you act quickly. Monitoring and recording any illness in the herd so you can spot the trends of an outbreak can help you to keep on top of calf pneumonia.

Using a scoring system such as the Madison-Wisconsin system or the chart which comes with the Calf Health Checklist can help you to be consistent when monitoring for disease.

Typically calves which develop pneumonia start off being lethargic and eating less due to a spike in temperature before

the more classic signs of pneumonia such as nasal discharge, cough and lying down are seen. It is crucial to act quickly to identify, isolate and treat calves to minimise the spread of pneumonia in the herd.

Your vet will be able to help you come up with a treatment and management plan which is specific to your farm's set up and can be put into action rapidly in the event of a pneumonia outbreak. The below flow chart can be used as a starting point for making a plan for your farm.



Creating a plan to minimise a herd's chance of picking up pneumonia and focusing on preventive healthcare can take time and investment; however it will help to optimise your farm's potential, minimise time looking after sick animals and minimising the use of antibiotics.

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Bovipast® RSP



Reference: 1. Welsh Dairy Heifer Report (2015) Hybu Cig Cymru.

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