Beware the spring leptospirosis threat

Spring turnout is traditionally the time of year to make sure your herd is fully protected against bovine leptospirosis. This is because, at grass, uninfected cattle are suddenly exposed to the urine of infected animals that may be shedding the disease. Moist spring grass is also a favourable environment for leptospirosis to survive outside the host.

New data from the last 18 months, using the MSD Animal Health ExpertisTM BeefCheck and DairyCheck schemes, show that 45% of unvaccinated farms were positive for leptospirosis antibodies, including 58% dairy herds.

Leptospirosis is caused by a bacterial infection, and there are two strains which are known to affect UK herds: L. hardjo and L. pomona. In some cases, the effects can be dramatic. For example, in a recent leptospirosis outbreak in Ayr reported in March this year, 12 cows from a herd of 160 experienced a sudden onset drop in milk production. In many cases, however, the effects of the disease are less visible but no less costly and include infertility and calf health problems.

Leptospirosis also infects people, for example through contact with infected urine. The latest data from Public Health England shows that farmers are at particular risk of contracting this infection, which can cause severe flu-like symptoms that can last for weeks or months.

As the days lengthen the cold strengthens or so the saying goes, and to be fair we have seen some temperatures approaching 0°C and even slightly lower recently. Whilst we are all sure to notice it and put on an extra layer, we wouldn’t expect our stock to bat an eyelid. However, there is one group that will definitely notice too, young calves.

Every animal, even us, has a temperature range called the thermo-neutral zone in which there is no extra energy required to maintain body temperature. The lower end of this range is called the lower critical temperature. If the animal is in an environment with a temperature lower than its thermo-neutral zone it must use additional energy to maintain its body temperature. This isn’t generally a problem for adult cattle as their lower critical temperature is well below 0°C, but for a new-born dairy calf the lower critical temperature is around 10°C. This is assuming the calf is housed in a well-insulated, dry and draft free environment.

So if a calf is in a draught, on a damp bed or lying against concrete or metal its lower critical temperature will be even higher. What all this means in real terms is that when the temperature drops below 10°C your calf will start using energy from its feeds to keep warm, and as a result less energy is available for growth. The growth rate and performance of your calves will suffer, and as we know the first 8 weeks are crucial for a calf’s long-term health and productivity. Also feed efficiency takes a blow, costing you money.

There are several things you can do to help your calves in cold weather. Make sure their pen is dry, kneel down on their bed without waterproofs on, your knees should stay dry, any wet patches and it’s too damp. Check there are no draughts at calf level, providing shelters or large bales as windbreaks can help.

Planning for lungworm control

Turning out young stock may not be on your agenda for a week or two yet but regardless it’s a good time to get thinking about controlling lungworm. Huskvac has been tried and trusted for many years as a means of protecting cattle against lungworm in their first grazing season. The recommended protocol is to give two doses 4 weeks apart followed by turnout to pasture two weeks later. It is also possible to boost immunity from one year to the next by given a single dose before turnout. Remember that exposure to lungworm in the pasture then helps build the immunity so be careful when you worm and what products your using. If in doubt speak to your regular vet or Mark Pass at Beeston Animal Health for help.

Have you got your jacket on?

As the days lengthen the cold strengthens or so the saying goes, and to be fair we have seen some temperatures approaching 0°C and even slightly lower recently. Whilst we are all sure to notice it and put on an extra layer, we wouldn’t expect our stock to bat an eyelid. However, there is one group that will definitely notice too, young calves.

Every animal, even us, has a temperature range called the thermo-neutral zone in which there is no extra energy required to maintain body temperature. The lower end of this range is called the lower critical temperature. If the animal is in an environment with a temperature lower than its thermo-neutral zone it must use additional energy to maintain its body temperature. This isn’t generally a problem for adult cattle as their lower critical temperature is well below 0°C, but for a new-born dairy calf the lower critical temperature is around 10°C. This is assuming the calf is housed in a well-insulated, dry and draft free environment.

So if a calf is in a draught, on a damp bed or lying against concrete or metal its lower critical temperature will be even higher. What all this means in real terms is that when the temperature drops below 10°C your calf will start using energy from its feeds to keep warm, and as a result less energy is available for growth. The growth rate and performance of your calves will suffer, and as we know the first 8 weeks are crucial for a calf’s long-term health and productivity. Also feed efficiency takes a blow, costing you money.

There are several things you can do to help your calves in cold weather. Make sure their pen is dry, kneel down on their bed without waterproofs on, your knees should stay dry, any wet patches and it’s too damp. Check there are no draughts at calf level, providing shelters or large bales as windbreaks can help.

Planning for lungworm control

Turning out young stock may not be on your agenda for a week or two yet but regardless it’s a good time to get thinking about controlling lungworm. Huskvac has been tried and trusted for many years as a means of protecting cattle against lungworm in their first grazing season. The recommended protocol is to give two doses 4 weeks apart followed by turnout to pasture two weeks later. It is also possible to boost immunity from one year to the next by given a single dose before turnout. Remember that exposure to lungworm in the pasture then helps build the immunity so be careful when you worm and what products your using. If in doubt speak to your regular vet or Mark Pass at Beeston Animal Health for help.

Have you got your jacket on?

As the days lengthen the cold strengthens or so the saying goes, and to be fair we have seen some temperatures approaching 0°C and even slightly lower recently. Whilst we are all sure to notice it and put on an extra layer, we wouldn’t expect our stock to bat an eyelid. However, there is one group that will definitely notice too, young calves.

Every animal, even us, has a temperature range called the thermo-neutral zone in which there is no extra energy required to maintain body temperature. The lower end of this range is called the lower critical temperature. If the animal is in an environment with a temperature lower than its thermo-neutral zone it must use additional energy to maintain its body temperature. This isn’t generally a problem for adult cattle as their lower critical temperature is well below 0°C, but for a new-born dairy calf the lower critical temperature is around 10°C. This is assuming the calf is housed in a well-insulated, dry and draft free environment.

So if a calf is in a draught, on a damp bed or lying against concrete or metal its lower critical temperature will be even higher. What all this means in real terms is that when the temperature drops below 10°C your calf will start using energy from its feeds to keep warm, and as a result less energy is available for growth. The growth rate and performance of your calves will suffer, and as we know the first 8 weeks are crucial for a calf’s long-term health and productivity. Also feed efficiency takes a blow, costing you money.

There are several things you can do to help your calves in cold weather. Make sure their pen is dry, kneel down on their bed without waterproofs on, your knees should stay dry, any wet patches and it’s too damp. Check there are no draughts at calf level, providing shelters or large bales as windbreaks can help.

Planning for lungworm control

Turning out young stock may not be on your agenda for a week or two yet but regardless it’s a good time to get thinking about controlling lungworm. Huskvac has been tried and trusted for many years as a means of protecting cattle against lungworm in their first grazing season. The recommended protocol is to give two doses 4 weeks apart followed by turnout to pasture two weeks later. It is also possible to boost immunity from one year to the next by given a single dose before turnout. Remember that exposure to lungworm in the pasture then helps build the immunity so be careful when you worm and what products your using. If in doubt speak to your regular vet or Mark Pass at Beeston Animal Health for help.

Have you got your jacket on?

As the days lengthen the cold strengthens or so the saying goes, and to be fair we have seen some temperatures approaching 0°C and even slightly lower recently. Whilst we are all sure to notice it and put on an extra layer, we wouldn’t expect our stock to bat an eyelid. However, there is one group that will definitely notice too, young calves.

Every animal, even us, has a temperature range called the thermo-neutral zone in which there is no extra energy required to maintain body temperature. The lower end of this range is called the lower critical temperature. If the animal is in an environment with a temperature lower than its thermo-neutral zone it must use additional energy to maintain its body temperature. This isn’t generally a problem for adult cattle as their lower critical temperature is well below 0°C, but for a new-born dairy calf the lower critical temperature is around 10°C. This is assuming the calf is housed in a well-insulated, dry and draft free environment.

So if a calf is in a draught, on a damp bed or lying against concrete or metal its lower critical temperature will be even higher. What all this means in real terms is that when the temperature drops below 10°C your calf will start using energy from its feeds to keep warm, and as a result less energy is available for growth. The growth rate and performance of your calves will suffer, and as we know the first 8 weeks are crucial for a calf’s long-term health and productivity. Also feed efficiency takes a blow, costing you money.

There are several things you can do to help your calves in cold weather. Make sure their pen is dry, kneel down on their bed without waterproofs on, your knees should stay dry, any wet patches and it’s too damp. Check there are no draughts at calf level, providing shelters or large bales as windbreaks can help.
The NJMP was developed and agreed by a technical steering group of leading experts to provide a series of six strategies for Johne’s disease control on farm. Action Johne’s realises that every farm is different and is about working with your herd vet to choose strategies that meet the needs and aspirations of your farm. These strategies to control Johne’s disease in the dairy herd are:

1. Biosecurity, protect and monitor
2. Improved farm management
3. Improved farm management, risk assessment and strategic testing
4. Improved farm management, test and cull
5. Breed to terminal sire
6. Firebreak vaccination

Since April, milk purchasers covering 80% of UK milk produced by volume have committed to deliver the NJMP through their farmers. There is a new website, leaflets, buying guides and webinars to help farmers, vets and milk purchasers understand what they need to do to take control of Johne’s on farm; additionally, the British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA) are providing further veterinary training.

Other things that have been happening

- Arla sent out questionnaire to farmers in September to find out how many farmers currently know their Johne’s status and whether any have adopted strategies from the NJMP. Approximately 45% of farmers have replied so far. Arla farmers are also being invited to workshops across the country from March to June on call health and Johne’s.
- CIS will start an html newsletter in 2016, with Johne’s disease as one of their lead articles to share key messages. They have launched CHeCS monitoring service for Johne’s, which is proving popular with farmers.
- First Milk: Their core groups supplying Nestle are working on a fast track programme to implement the National Johne’s Management Plan. 80% of farmers have so far returned their declaration forms which have been signed off by their farm vets confirming they understand their Johne’s status and have a control strategy in place.
- Muller Wiseman sent an initial questionnaire and letter out in Feb 2015. 85% of their 1150 farmers have confirmed their status and are testing in one form or other. The questionnaire has been followed up with meetings, attended by Karen Bond. Muller are approaching the 15% of farmers who have not declared their status to query why and offer support.
- NPL will be following on from the success of the 2014/15 30 Cow Challenge by encouraging farmers to move towards risk based testing and management. This will be done by the provision of a risk assessment tool and further farmer meetings.
- My Healthy Herd: A NJMP module has been developed for robust management and tracking of JD management; abstracts have also been submitted to World Buiatrics.
- Dairy Crest Direct is encouraging all of its members to complete a whole herd Johne’s screening, to agree with their vet a Johne’s protocol, and to return a vet signed declaration by 29th Feb 16. Dairy Crest Direct are also being invited to workshops across the country from March to June on call health and Johne’s.
- OMSCo – 100% of farmers are signed up to be a part of the NJMP and know the status of their herd – their 250 members have all signed up.
- DCD Davidstow members - 100% of the membership have completed a vet signed JD protocol declaration, and are now embarking on Year Two of the same process with encouragement for all to complete a whole herd screening, to be completed by 29th Feb 16.
- OmSco – 100% of farmers are signed up to be a part of the NJMP and know the status of their herd – their 250 members have all signed up.

For more information contact your herd vet or team@actionjohnes.co.uk or log on to the website www.actionjohnes.org.