

ADVANCE

cattle health scheme

Leptospirosis



Leptospirosis in cattle is an economically important disease caused by spirochaete bacteria, *Leptospira hardjo*. The organism is a potential zoonosis, causing a 'flu like illness and sometimes death, if untreated, in affected humans.

Approximately 75% of UK cattle (dairy and beef) have been exposed to *Leptospira hardjo*. After infection, cattle harbour the bacteria in their kidneys for months, even years, excreting many leptospores in their urine, so acting as a reservoir of infection.

Common clinical problems include:

- ◆ Infertility and abortion. Affected cattle can be treated with antibiotics. In the case of an abortion storm, groups of cows can be treated prophylactically with antibiotics to reduce the risk of further abortions.
- ◆ Milk drop—"flabby bag"

Risk factors increasing the likelihood of infection on a farm include buying in cattle, use of a bull rather than AI, having cattle grazing alongside sheep and access to open watercourses.

Costs

The overall costs of disease caused by leptospirosis average out at £68-£106 / cow in an affected herd. (Moredun Foundation 2007). There is also the risk to humans working with infected animals to consider.

Guide to Sampling

Antibody tests are used to determine whether a herd is infected. Consult your veterinary surgeon for the best testing strategy for your particular herd.

For infected herds, vaccination is an effective way of preventing circulation of disease and improving fertility.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to distinguish between an infected and a vaccinated animal on laboratory testing, so once a vaccine is in place on a farm, working towards accredited disease free status is not possible.



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