



AHI BULLETIN

Redwater

Mild, damp conditions are ideal for ticks which are responsible for spreading the redwater parasite. Redwater is a potentially life-threatening disease in cattle which gets its name from the frothy red-brown urine produced by affected animals.

An unusual feature of redwater is that calves under 6 months of age are resistant to the disease. They do not develop clinical disease if exposed to the redwater parasite but do go on to develop immunity. This explains why cattle born on farms in heavily infested areas tend not to develop clinical redwater. However, if animals older than six to nine months are moved from an area where the redwater parasite is not present to one where it is, they will be susceptible to infection and serious illness.

Early signs of redwater include an animal not staying with the herd, reduced appetite, high temperature and 'pipestem' diarrhoea. The animal develops red urine because the parasite damages blood cells which are then passed in the urine. Late stage signs are weakness and inability to stand, pale or yellow (jaundiced) skin and mucous membranes, low temperature, constipation and normal coloured urine. Once an animal reaches this stage, it can quickly progress to death. Prompt veterinary treatment is essential, and may include blood transfusions and treatment with Imidocarb (available as a prescription-only medicine). The withdrawal period for Imidocarb is very long, being 213 days and 21 days for meat and milk, respectively.

Topical tick treatments will prevent cattle from being infested with ticks and infected with the redwater parasite. However, when the effect of these wears off, the animal's susceptibility to ticks and the redwater parasite is the same as it was before treatment. Product directions should be followed closely to ensure cattle are protected for high risk periods.

Imidocarb, at twice the treatment dose, will limit the multiplication of the redwater parasite for approximately four weeks. If cattle become infected during this period they can develop a natural immunity without becoming ill. It is important to note that imidocarb used preventatively in this way is not a vaccine and this strategy will only help if infected ticks are active in the four weeks after it is administered.

Talk to your veterinary practitioner about the best time to use preventive products and which ones are most suitable for your farm. Redwater control is difficult and even after treatment animals should be monitored closely.

[Click here](#) for more information on Redwater.