



Lungworm (hoose) in Irish cattle

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Lungworm (hoose) is a very common problem in Irish cattle in late summer and autumn. Outbreaks in herds are unpredictable and depend on weather conditions. The larvae of the lungworm parasites are ingested off the pastures and migrate into the lung tissue where they mature. The irritation and damage to the lung tissues results in coughing as the main sign of infection. Clinical signs can also include increased breathing rate, difficulty in breathing, lack of appetite, weight loss, drop in milk yield and sudden death in severe cases.

Lungworm is usually a problem in first season grazers or autumn born calves and cattle usually develop immunity by the time they are adults after exposure to the worms. This immunity can wane over time if animals are not periodically re-exposed to the worms. Clinical signs can also occur in adults if the burden of parasites on the pasture is sufficiently high to overcome their immunity. Additionally, if animals are not adequately exposed to lungworm as calves to develop immunity in the first instance, for example because of repeated dosing with long-acting wormers, they may also be at risk of developing hoose in their second grazing season or as adults.

Animals suspected of having a lungworm infection should be treated immediately, as animals can deteriorate quickly. They can continue coughing for a number of days as they clear the dead worms from their lungs. Lungworm infection can be complicated by secondary bacterial infections so always consult with your veterinary practitioner if animals are not improving.

Dung samples are not usually helpful in diagnosing acute lungworm infection as it takes some weeks for the immature larvae to develop into adults that produce eggs. A lung wash can be performed by your veterinary practitioner to look for larvae in the airways and lungs. There are other causes of coughing and blood samples or nasal swabs to look for viruses or bacteria may also be needed. If there is a recurrent problem on farm, it is useful to discuss options such as vaccination or grazing management with your veterinary practitioner.



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