

Lungworm

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Lungworm (hoose) is a common problem on Irish cattle farms with outbreaks usually seen late in summer and into autumn, but these can be highly unpredictable. It is important to recognise the clinical signs early and treat immediately with a wormer as lungworm can cause lasting damage to the lungs, even resulting in sudden death. Some animals do not respond well to treatment and may take a long time to recover. Animals may also develop secondary infections from bacteria and viruses and may need supportive treatments. Dung samples are not usually helpful in diagnosing lungworm infection as it takes some weeks for the immature larvae to develop into adults that produce eggs.

The animals most at risk of clinical disease are first season grazing calves (dairy and autumn-born sucklers). Spring-born suckler calves will be more at risk late in the grazing season as their grass intake increases around weaning. Coughing is usually the clinical sign noticed first but animals can have an increased rate or difficulty in breathing. This is usually more obvious when animals are being moved. Animals can lose condition quickly and in dairy cows, there is a loss in milk yield.



Cattle usually develop immunity to lungworm by the time they are adults after exposure to the worms. This natural immunity wanes over time and high pasture burdens can overwhelm animals resulting in clinical signs. In some cases, cattle may not have been sufficiently exposed to lungworm by the time they are adults e.g. if there is no lungworm on the farm, and remain at risk of disease.

Lungworm larvae contamination builds up on the pastures over the summer season. Land that was not previously grazed by calves, newly sown grass fields, silage or hay aftergrass, and alternate grazing with sheep all decrease the risk of high burdens on the pastures. Strategic dosing can also be used to minimise pasture contamination. Vaccination can be useful on farms with repeated outbreaks or if bringing in new animals onto the farm. Speak to your veterinary practitioner about the best treatment and control options for your farm.

