

Outbreaks of scour and ill thrift linked to rumen fluke

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Historically, rumen fluke was not thought to cause major disease in cattle or sheep in Ireland. In recent years however, there have been increasing reports of outbreaks of scour and ill thrift that have been linked to rumen fluke, specifically the immature stage of the parasite. A spike in disease is suspected to be linked with periods of higher rainfall. The outbreaks have been seen late in the grazing season and can result in scours unresponsive to standard treatments, weight loss, low blood protein and death in severe cases.

The adult stage of the parasite is seen in the rumen (stomach) while the immature stage lives in the small intestine. The adult stage is not usually considered to cause disease, so the presence of rumen fluke in animals that are performing well does not generally require treatment. The rumen fluke parasite is widespread in Ireland, with rumen fluke eggs being reported in 30%-40% of cattle faecal samples submitted to the Regional Veterinary Laboratories in the last few years. However, eggs are only seen if adult parasites are present. For these reasons, faecal egg counts for rumen fluke eggs are not reliable on their own for confirming a diagnosis. Large numbers of immature rumen fluke attached to the intestinal wall at post-mortem examination, along with clinical signs, are a reliable way to confirm disease caused by the immature stages of the parasite.

A history of grazing low-lying wetter areas of pasture, especially in late summer or autumn, along with clinical signs may be suggestive of rumen fluke. This is because rumen fluke require a snail intermediate host, similar to liver fluke, that can be found in waterlogged areas. If possible, fence off drains, ponds and watercourses, particularly during the high-risk period late in the grazing season.

Treatment

Routine treatment of rumen fluke is rarely justified, unless there are clinical cases on the farm. Consult with your veterinary practitioner for treatment and control options. The detection of rumen fluke eggs in faecal samples, or the detection of the adult parasite in small numbers in the rumen in the absence of any clinical signs of disease (e.g. scouring, ill thrift), is not in itself a reason to treat. Light infections appear to have no effect on animal health or productivity.

Most medicines that control liver fluke do not kill rumen fluke. It has been reported that the active ingredient oxcyclozanide can kill immature and mature stages of the rumen fluke parasite, but the medicine has not yet been licenced in Ireland for this. The frequency and dosage are different to that recommended for liver fluke control so always seek veterinary advice on rumen fluke treatment.

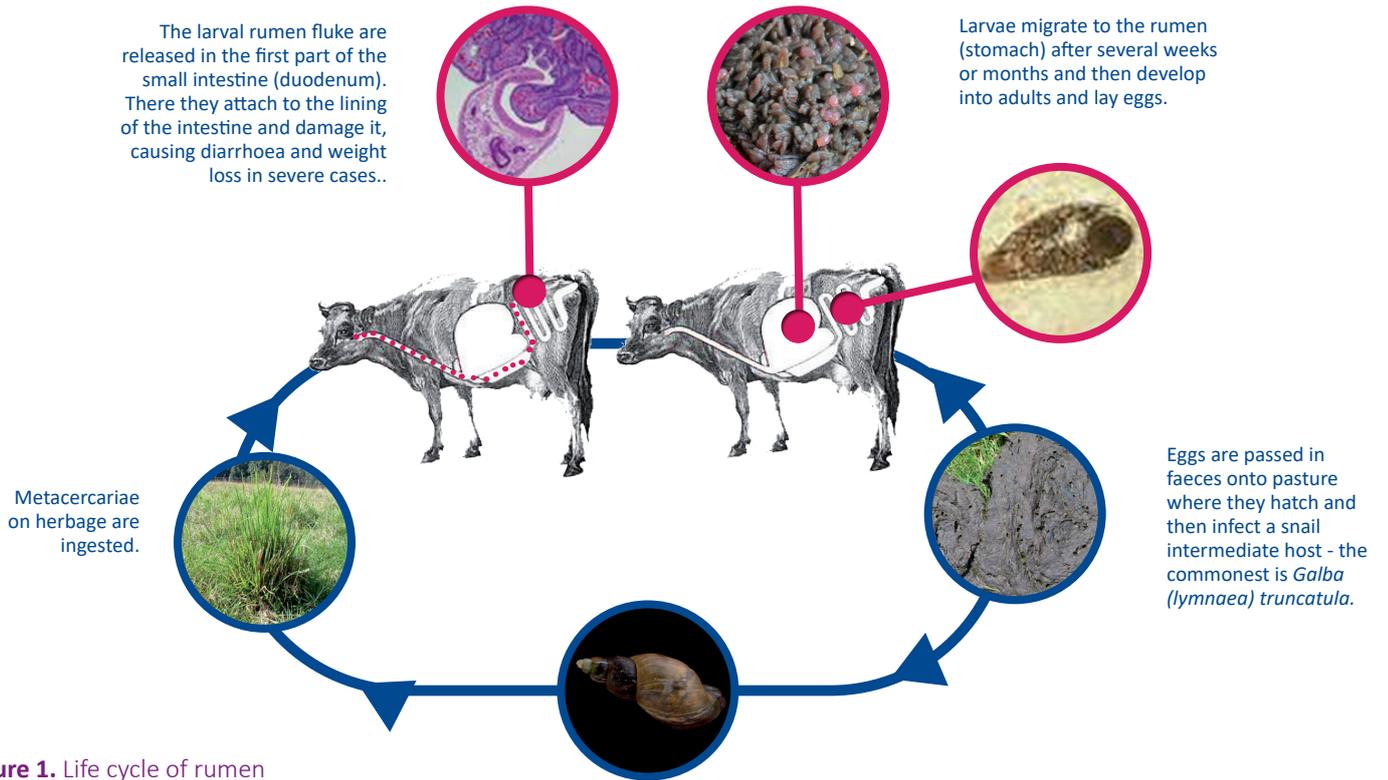


Figure 1. Life cycle of rumen fluke *Calicophoron daubneyi*. Both cattle and sheep are equally susceptible to infestation

