

# Dosing at housing - assess your parasite control plan

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**D**osing is often carried out when animals are going into housing but it is also a good time to assess how effective your parasite control plan has been over the grazing period. During housing, cattle do not pick-up any new worm or fluke infections, as these occur mainly at grazing on pasture. Effective treatment at housing can therefore keep animals virtually free of worms and liver fluke until they are back on pasture in spring. However, lice and mites infestations can become problematic over the housing period and these should be prevented for the good welfare of the animals.

Animals with a large burden of parasites can be associated with economic losses even if there are no obvious clinical signs. It is good practice to measure the performance of your animals through growth rates, fertility, body condition scores or milk yield. If animals are meeting their targets, then your parasite control plan is likely to be effective, but a review may identify areas for improvement or cost savings. For example, health information at slaughter captured by the Beef HealthCheck programme show that some animals slaughtered in early spring have liver fluke at slaughter. These animals may not have been effectively treated at housing and if these are young stock, they are likely to take an average of 33 days longer to reach slaughter compared to animals without liver fluke.



The target parasites at housing are gut worms, lungworm, liver fluke, lice and mites. Antiparasitic products can work for more than one type of parasite, so it is important to discuss which product is best for your farm depending on the parasite control plan in your herd.

- Make sure to only use combination products if it is necessary to target multiple parasite types, e.g. use a wormer and flukicide product only if targeting both gut worms and liver fluke.
- Using a product targeting the inhibited larvae of the stomach worm *Ostertagia* at housing can reduce the risk of serious disease in late winter/early spring. Products containing levamisole (yellow drench) are not effective against these inhibited larvae. Instead use a product from the clear drenches (macrocyclic lactones) or certain white drenches (benzimidazoles).
- If treating animals for lice and mites, make sure to treat all in-contact animals in the group.
- When treating for liver fluke, ensure the product works for the stage of the liver fluke life cycle that is expected to be present i.e. in the first 8-12 weeks after housing either use a product that is effective against immature liver fluke or re-treat if necessary after this time. A dung sample 8 weeks after treatment at housing can be taken to check whether additional fluke treatments are needed.
- Always check the withdrawal period for finishing animals and dairy cows.

Many suckler farmers will have taken part in the BEEP-S programme and submitted a dung sample for testing before October. It is important to note that this was only a snapshot in time and it is good to discuss the results with your veterinary practitioner. For example, not seeing liver fluke eggs does not exclude the possibility that the cattle are infected with immature fluke which are not yet producing eggs. Factory reports from the Beef HealthCheck programme also give an indication if there is liver fluke on farm. Also, the presence of rumen fluke eggs do not usually require treatment unless clinical signs are present. Discuss any treatments with your veterinary practitioner.