

What are the most common conditions causing lameness on Irish dairy farms?

Ned Dunphy and Ger Cusack members of the Hoof HealthCheck Technical Working Group

Lameness may result from both infectious and non-infectious causes

Non-infectious lesions causing lameness

White line disease

The white line is a cemented junction on the sole of the foot where the horn of the sole is joined to the horn of the hoof wall. As a cemented junction, it is the weakest part of the sole and the part that is most vulnerable to being breached. White line damage due to physical trauma and shearing forces (occurring when turning on a hard surface) can result in loose stones and grit penetrating the white line. Such penetration leads to entry of infection, inflammation, and resultant lameness.

Treatment involves careful examination to identify the lesion. Using the 5 step Dutch method of hoof trimming, the damaged wall/sole is removed.

A shoe or block may be applied to the sound claw.



Sole bruising

This is due to damage to the germinal layer of cells ('quick') that are responsible for producing sole horn. Factors that contribute to this include excessive standing on concrete, excessive body condition loss and worn claws due to excessive walking.

Treatment for sole bruising involving resting the cow and keeping her on a soft surface until she recovers. If only one claw affected, a block can be applied to the unaffected claw.



Sole ulcer

A sole ulcer is essentially a much more severe case of a sole haemorrhage. The 'quick' is so severely damaged that some cells no longer produce horn. A complete hole in the sole results allowing the sensitive 'quick' to protrude. This leads to a very painful lameness condition.

Treatment for sole ulcers requires the removal of sole overgrowth using the 5 step Dutch method and the trimming of underrun horn and sharp edges. To relieve pressure and facilitate healing, a block can be applied to the sound claw.



Infectious diseases causing lameness

Foul of the foot

This is an infection affecting the tissue between the digits causing severe pain and swelling. Consult your vet regarding treatment as this involves antibiotic injections.

Early detection and prompt treatment give the best results.



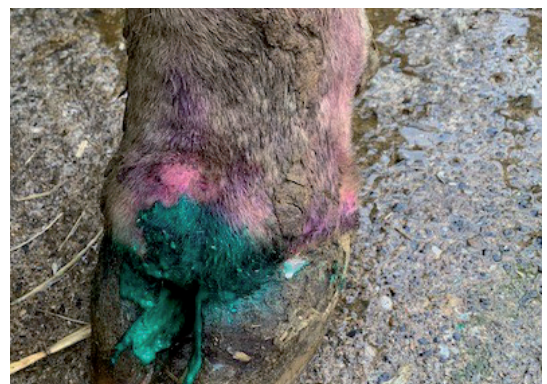
Mortellaro disease

(also known as digital dermatitis; DD)

This is an infectious disease that results in extremely painful lesions in the skin close to the hoof. It is contagious and can spread rapidly through a herd. Indoor housing, overcrowding and dirty conditions are a major risk factors that increase the spread of this condition.

Treatment involves cleaning and drying of the lesion, applying antibacterial products to the affected area for 3-4 days.

A regular foot bathing programme to prevent the spread of the diseases is very important.



Note: Farmers, hoof trimmers and vets all have a role to play in reducing lameness on dairy farms. Significant reductions in lameness prevalence and severity are possible by working together as a team and adopting a cow-centric approach.