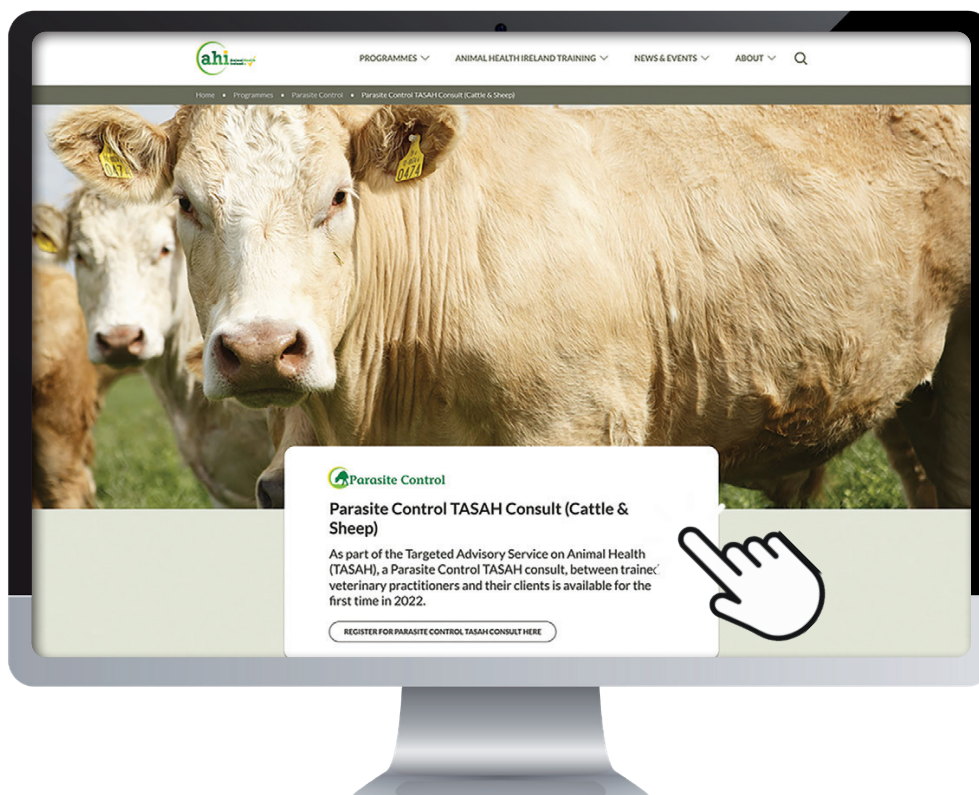


# Should I treat for rumen fluke?

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**R**umen fluke are a common parasite found in cattle and sheep in Ireland. While they are different from the liver fluke parasite they have a similar life cycle. The chances are good that any dung sample sent off to test for liver fluke has also come back positive for rumen fluke, so should we be treating these animals based on this finding?

The adult stage of the rumen fluke parasite is found in the rumen (stomach), while the immature larvae live 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 generally will not require treatment. Clinical disease can occur when large numbers of immature larvae cause intestinal damage and young animals can be more severely affected. A particularly wet, warm summer to autumn season could be a risk for this situation developing and clinical cases do occur occasionally in Ireland.



Clinical signs that have been reported include dullness, dehydration, rapid weight loss, severe watery scour, which may contain traces of blood, and low blood protein concentrations resulting in swelling under the jaw. These signs are not exclusively seen with rumen fluke and are not sufficiently reliable on their own to make a diagnosis. The clinical signs combined with a history of grazing low-lying wetter areas of pasture, especially in late summer or autumn, or that is not responding to other treatments may be suggestive of rumen fluke. Rumen fluke requires a snail intermediate host similar to liver fluke and wet areas suitable for the snail should be avoided during high-risk periods in autumn. Cattle which are young, sick, or poorly nourished appear to be more susceptible to rumen fluke infection.

Rumen fluke eggs or larvae detected in a faecal sample sent for laboratory testing can help confirm a diagnosis. However, eggs are only seen if adult parasites are present. Large numbers of immature rumen fluke attached to the intestinal wall at post-mortem examination, along with clinical signs, is a reliable way to confirm disease caused by the immature stages of the parasite.

## Control

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Reducing exposure to contaminated pasture and wetter areas of fields by fencing off drains, ponds and watercourses will help control rumen fluke. These measures will also reduce exposure to liver fluke.

## Treatment

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Most medicines that control liver fluke do not kill rumen fluke. It has been reported that oxyclozanide can kill immature and mature stages of the rumen fluke parasite, but the frequency and dosage required are different to those recommended for liver fluke control. Always seek veterinary advice on rumen fluke treatment. Routine treatment of rumen fluke is rarely justified, unless there are clinical cases on the farm or a history of previous problems with rumen fluke. 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, welfare or productivity.