

# ahi

## MONTHLY NEWS

February Edition | 2024

AHIMONBULL 15.02.2024

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*To contribute to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable farming and agri-food sector through improved animal health and welfare.*



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# BVD MESSAGES AT THE START OF THE CALVING SEASON

Dr Maria Guelbenzu, BVD Programme Manager

**W**ith the calving season upon us, it is important to remember that some simple steps can be taken to prevent the spread of BVD as we move toward eradication. Whilst the number of BVD affected herds is now very low, the impact can be significant, both for herds with positive results and their neighbours so it is critical to ensure that all possible measures are in place to prevent the spread of infection.

## Sample calves promptly

- ✓ The longer a BVD virus positive (BVD+) calf is on farm, the more likely infection will spread within the farm as well as to other farms in the neighbourhood.
- ✓ Tag all newborn calves as soon as possible after birth. Note that calves must be dry to minimise the occurrence of 'empty' tags (tags that do not contain any tissue). Newborn calves should be isolated from pregnant cows and good biosecurity maintained until a negative result has been received.
- ✓ Those signed up to the National Genotyping Programme will have Double Tissue Tags. Note that BVD sampling through this scheme will require a new set of taggers. BVD sample bottles/vials and lab envelopes are white in colour whereas DNA sample bottles/vials and lab envelopes are pink. Ensure each sample type is sent to the appropriate laboratory.

## Send samples to lab quickly

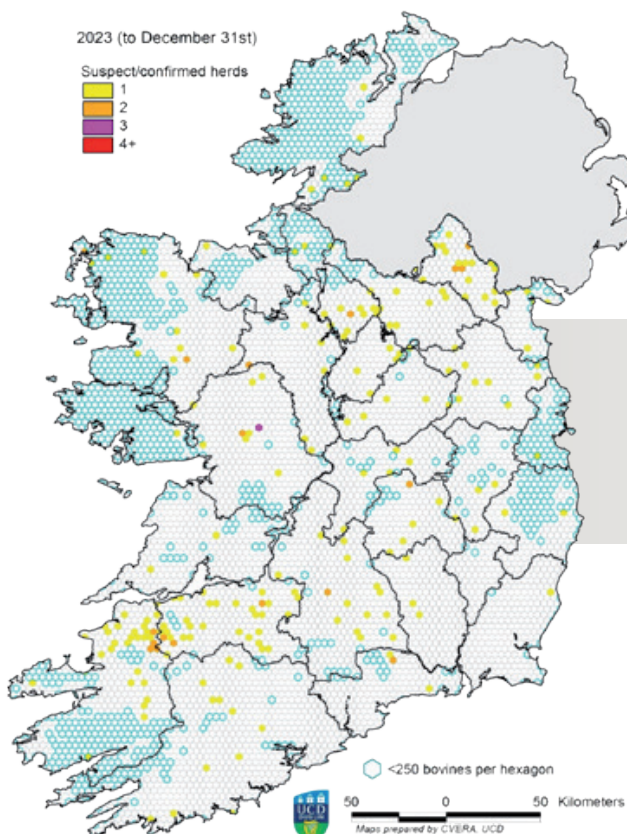
- ✓ Submit samples to the testing laboratory shortly after being taken. Place samples in a sealable bag within a padded envelope. Write your name, address and herd number on the top left hand corner of the envelope and remember to include the text 'Exempt Animal Specimen' on the back of the envelope.
- ✓ From 1st February 2024, the minimum fee for submitting tags through the postal system (even for one tag) to a laboratory in Ireland or Northern Ireland is €2.95. This should be sufficient for up to 10 samples, provided they are packed flat, rather than bulked up within the envelope. For larger numbers, it is advisable to take your package to the post office to ensure the correct postage is paid.

## Act quickly if positive results are received

- ✓ Where positive or inconclusive tissue tag results are obtained, isolate the calves immediately and remove promptly to obtain the higher financial support from DAFM and reduce the risk of further within-herd spread resulting in sick calves, positive births or delayed lifting of restrictions and transmission to other herds. Confirmatory testing of these animals is no longer permitted.

## Be aware of the neighbourhood risk

- ✓ It is recognised that the closer herds are to an infected herd in their neighbourhood, the more likely they themselves are to experience infection. Recent analysis has shown that breeding herds within 400m of a positive herd have a one in seven chance of being positive the following year. For this reason, herds that are in the same neighbourhood as herds that had BVD+ calves in 2023 (herds within, or adjacent to, the coloured hexagons in Figure 1) are at particular risk of having had infection introduced last year, resulting in BVD+ births this year. It is particularly important that these herds should tag and test promptly and review biosecurity to ensure that any BVD+ calves are detected as quickly as possible, preventing virus spread within the herd and transfer to other herds. Check your locality in the map below.
- ✓ Taking this increased risk into account, DAFM will now issue a biosecurity advisory letter to all herds within 400m of herds with positive results, rather than just to contiguous herds, informing them of their increased risk of infection and providing appropriate advice.



**Figure 1.** Map showing the distribution of herds with BVD+ herds in 2023. Herds in these and adjacent hexagons are at increased risk of having BVD+ calves in 2024 and should ensure that calves are sampled and tested as soon as possible after birth and that biosecurity measures are in place.

## Biosecurity advice for herds in the neighbourhood of positive herds

A review of biosecurity, including vaccination, and extra precautions to be taken by herdowners and visitors, should include the following areas:

### **Purchased cattle (or those returning from sales, shows or contract rearing)**

- ✓ Introducing animals is an important way for BVD (and other diseases) to arrive on a farm. One way to control this risk is to hold introduced cattle in a quarantine facility (building or paddock) for at least 28 days. Where purchased cattle are pregnant, there is also the further risk that they may be trojan dams carrying a BVD+ foetus.
- ✓ Pregnant animals should therefore have their calves sampled promptly and kept away from other pregnant animals until tested negative for BVD. The use of hired, leased or borrowed bulls also poses a potential risk.

### **Movement of personnel without adequate attention to hygiene**

- ✓ All individuals coming onto a farm who may have had direct or indirect contact with cattle from other herds, including employees, relief workers, professional visitors (vet, AI, milk recorder, hoof trimmer etc) and the farmer themselves, should use farm specific boots and clothing or take steps to ensure that adequate cleaning and disinfection procedures are followed.

### **Boundary contact**

- ✓ Wherever possible, cattle up to at least 120 days of pregnancy should not graze at boundaries where nose to nose contact with other cattle is feasible. Boundaries should be sufficient to provide a gap of at least 3m and prevent cattle breaking in or out (even if only on a temporary basis using an electric fence).

### **Equipment**

- ✓ Movement or sharing of large or small items of equipment should be avoided where possible. Otherwise, these should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before use. This also applies to shared trailers, pens or crushes.

### **BVD vaccination**

- ✓ While vaccination will not prevent the entry of BVD virus (or IBR, Lepto etc) onto a farm, it can minimize the impact of accidental introduction. Herds that are vaccinating for BVD should complete the vaccination in the pre-breeding period, to maximise foetal protection.
- ✓ Herds that had a positive/inconclusive result in 2023 are required to undertake a second round of DAFM-funded vaccination in 2024 of all females aged 12 months old and above. It is key that this vaccination is given in the pre-breeding period. Note that this may be earlier than 12 months since the last vaccination round. This should give sufficient time for heifers to receive a completed primary course of vaccination.

# MAGNIFICENT MILK RECORDING

**Michelle McGrath**, CellCheck Assistant Programme Manager

**C**ommitting to beginning milk recording is the most difficult part because once you start and see the benefits it brings, you won't want to stop. Milk recording your cows regularly (ideally 6 times per lactation), allows you to easily see what is happening within your herd, identifying both problem cows and top performers. This enables you to make management decisions such as which cows are underperforming and spreading infection and should be culled, or which cows are high performers and are more suitable for breeding replacements. Milk recording also gives a better estimate of the value of your stock if selling or for disease compensation and also increases the herd's productivity thereby reducing the carbon footprint of every litre of milk.

To get the best value from milk recording, the first milk recording should be done within 2 months of calving. So in practical terms, if you started calving in mid-January then you need to have the first milk recording completed by St Patrick's Day. Don't wait until all the cows have calved.

An early milk recording (within the first 2 months of calving) allows you to assess how your dry period went and identify 'problem' cows or cows with an SCC of greater than 200,000 cells/ml, which indicates they have mastitis. The dry period is assessed by measuring both the number of cows that were 'cured' from infection and the number of cows that 'picked up a new infection', during the dry period. When the first milk recording is done later than 2 months after calving, we can't say for sure if the cow became infected during the dry period or during lactation since calving.

Milk recording identifies and facilitates the management of problem cows early in the lactation before they have the opportunity to cause long term damage to your herd's average SCC. These problem cows infect the healthy cows in your herd at every milking which will cause your bulk tank SCC to increase and resulting in a reduced milk price for you. Research has also shown that farmers that milk record have higher gross margins of €39 per cow as they achieve higher milk yields by 178 litres and higher milk solids by 29kg per cow than those that don't milk record.

Following each recording, a report containing individual cow information and a CellCheck summary report is provided. Understanding these reports may appear tricky initially but a number of resources are available to help farmers work through the reports, including milk recording organisations, veterinary practitioners and advisors. Make use of this support as failure to act on the milk recording results limits the potential benefits from milk recording.

Contact one of the following milk recording organisations to find out more and to book in your first recording now, to get the date that suits you.

- ▶ **[www.progressivegenetics.ie](http://www.progressivegenetics.ie)**
- ▶ **[www.munsterbovine.ie](http://www.munsterbovine.ie)**
- ▶ **[www.dairydata.ie](http://www.dairydata.ie)**
- ▶ **Tipperary Co-op Tel: 086-8106661**



**<https://animalhealthireland.ie/programmes/cellcheck/>**

# DAIRY COW MANAGEMENT AROUND CALVING TO REDUCE RISK OF LAMENESS

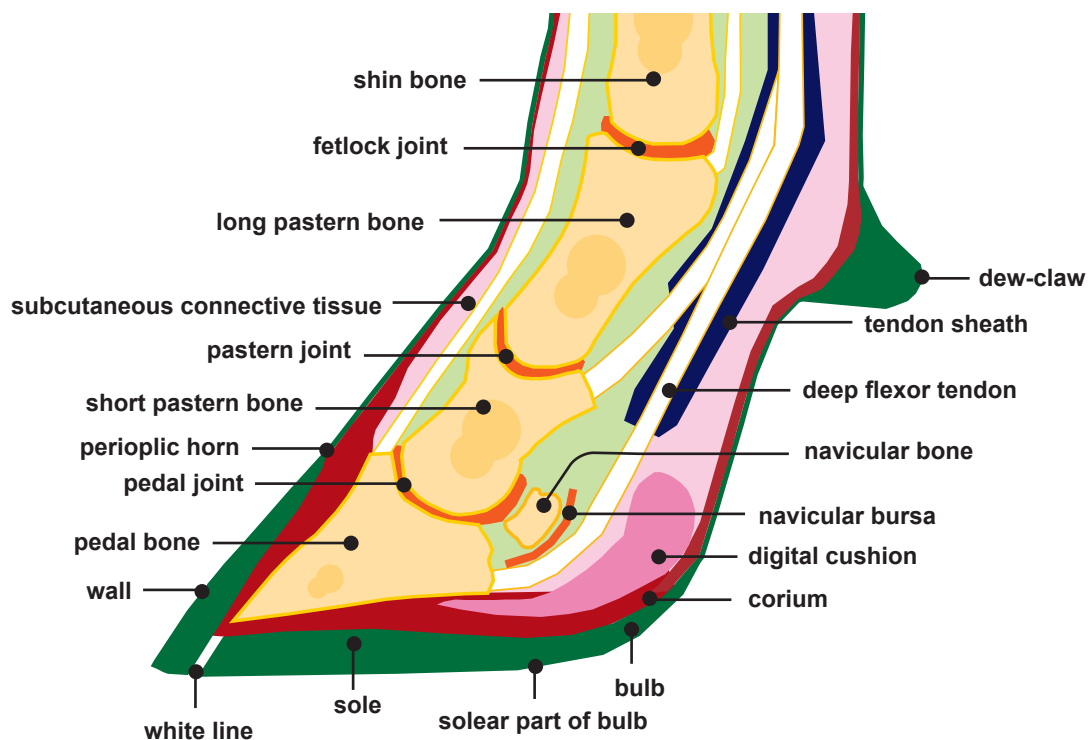
Ger Cusack, Veterinary Practitioner and member of the Hoof HealthCheck Technical Working Group

**F**ebruary and March are the busiest months of the year on any spring calving dairy farm. Many veterinary practitioners see cases of lameness arising in the first 3 months post calving.

## Why does this happen?

There are a few factors contributing to this greater lameness risk.

Firstly, as a cow prepares for the calving event, her body releases a hormone called relaxin. This hormone release is an important part of the calving process. It causes the ligaments around the birth canal to soften. This softening allows the birth canal to expand to accommodate the birthing process. As farmers, you will recognize this as “the dropping of the pin bones”. Unfortunately, the hormone relaxin also affects the ligaments supporting the pedal bone. This is a small bone about 5 centimetres long which sits within the hoof. Softening of the ligaments supporting this bone results in the bone becoming unstable. Movement of this bone can result in bruising of the sole of the foot and the



production of weaker hoof horn. Softer horn is less durable and the cow is therefore at greater risk of becoming lame in the following few months. This hormone affects all cows in the week leading up to calving and for one to two weeks post calving.

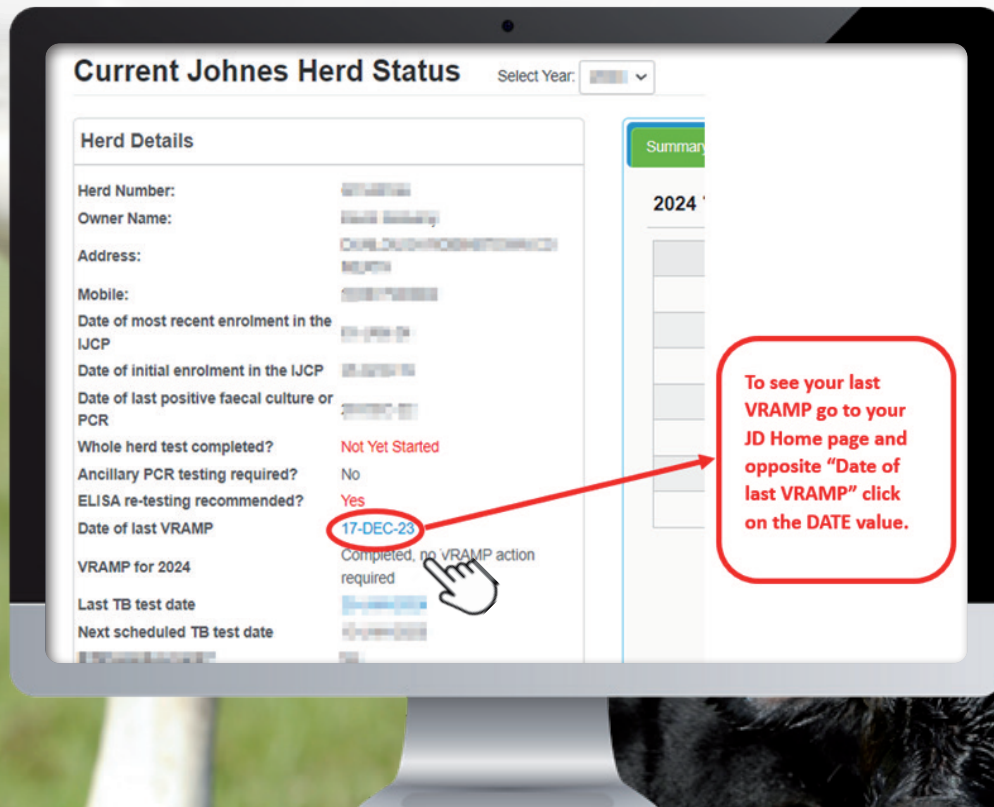
A second factor that is likely to be at play in the early post calving period is loss of body condition. Research has shown that cows that are thin ( $BCS < 2.75$ ) are at a greater risk of becoming lame. Within the hoof, there is a pad of fat that acts as an anti-concussion or shock absorber cushion. Thin cows have a smaller fat pad, experience less shock absorption, and are more likely to become lame.

## TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- ▶ **Move cows gently, avoiding running, pushing or competing for space.**
- ▶ **Avoid walking freshly calved cows for long distances.**
- ▶ **Keep cows close to the parlour for as long as possible (minimum 48 hours) to allow the pedal bone to settle post-calving.**
- ▶ **Plan paddock grazing so that freshly calved cows graze near the milking parlour.**
- ▶ **Mix groups well in advance of calving to avoid fighting and bullying around calving.**
- ▶ **Introduce first calving heifers to the main herd well before calving.**
- ▶ **Ensure that freshly calved cows have adequate feed space (minimum 600mm or 2 feet).**
- ▶ **Give access to comfortable cubicles or straw bedded area to enable cows to lie down as much as possible both before and for the week after calving.**
- ▶ **Calve cows in correct body condition (3.00 to 3.25) and manage feeding to minimize body condition loss in the weeks following calving.**
- ▶ **Treat lame cows promptly and give them access to straw bedded area to avoid the risk of further injury.**

**Liam Doyle**, John's disease Programme Manager

## Accessing the AHI dashboards



Remember that it is not just IJCP herds that should be putting measures in place to combat JD. All farms are at risk of infection with JD, although a continuous year on year history of negative herd tests builds confidence of its absence. As an added benefit, the hygiene measures put in place to combat JD transmission to calves will also reduce transmission of other diseases, which in turn improves both calf and cow health, enhancing overall productivity and welfare levels.

The following are some measures that all herds can adopt to protect calves and try to break the transmission cycle which infects them with JD. Look at the suggestions and determine which are the most practical for you and try to implement as many of them as possible over time, building them into your normal working routine:

- ✓ If you are herd testing for JD use the results to identify high-risk cows using test results, in collaboration with your veterinary practitioner. As far as is possible given your farm circumstances separate high-risk cows from the main herd for calving, so that calves from low-risk cows are not exposed to dung from high-risk cows.
- ✓ Clean cows of dung before they enter calving pens.
- ✓ Keep calving pens clean and dry. Remove dung and replace soiled bedding regularly.
- ✓ Do not use calf pens to hold sick adult cattle.
- ✓ Separate calves as soon after birth as possible, into a clean nesting area.
- ✓ Prevent manure from the calving pen and other adult facilities from getting into the calf pens; when you enter the calf pens clean or use separate boots, wash hands, change soiled clothes if necessary, or have someone dedicated to looking after the calves.
- ✓ If you are herd testing for JD use the results to select replacement calves from low-risk cows; do not keep replacement heifer calves from high-risk cows (particularly their most recent calves).
- ✓ Collect and prepare milk and colostrum hygienically, avoiding faecal contamination.
- ✓ Ensure that calves receive colostrum – remember the Colostrum 1, 2, 3 rule: The *1st MILK*, and only the first milk the cow produces, should be used to feed to the newborn calf for its first feed; Feed calves within *2 HOURS* of birth as antibody absorption is highest at this time; Feed *3 LITRES* to ensure the calf receives enough antibodies.
- ✓ Use JD herd testing results to provide colostrum and milk from low-risk sources (individual test-negative, low-risk cows or if not herd testing, from their own dam), particularly for calves intended to be retained as replacements or sold for breeding. Preferably do not use pooled colostrum or milk (even pooled from low-risk sources).
- ✓ If possible, house calves to be retained as replacements separate from calves from high-risk cows.

For further information on the AHI website about how to help control JD in your herd check out the following link which will take you to the relevant fact sheets and documents related to JD.

**[AHI Johnes Resource Documents](#)**





[www.animalhealthireland.ie](http://www.animalhealthireland.ie)

