

# IS IT A FLUKE? CONTROLLING LIVER AND RUMEN FLUKE

**Natascha Meunier**, Beef HealthCheck Programme Manager

**T**his year has seen a mild, wet summer following a mild winter and parasites like worms and flukes have thrived. With an increased worm burden comes reduced productivity, increased clinical disease and potential deaths in livestock. The Regional Veterinary Laboratories have issued a warning as they have seen significant numbers of issues with fluke and gut worms late this season. The Beef HealthCheck programme also saw the first increase of liver fluke at the meat factories in eight years. The farmer is best placed to spot any early signs of parasite problems and act accordingly, discussing the treatment and testing options with their veterinary practitioner, particularly as the early stages of infection can often have a negative faecal test result.

## Liver Fluke

Autumn is the peak period for liver fluke infections. During summer, the parasite matures within snail hosts, and the infective stage attaches to grass near waterlogged areas. Grazing in these areas during autumn should be avoided, if possible. After an animal is infected, it can take up to twelve weeks for the fluke parasites to migrate from the gut to the liver, where they mature into adults that lay eggs which are detectable in a faecal sample. If animals are treated for liver fluke a number of weeks before housing, a follow-up treatment may be necessary for any additional parasite infections picked up after the treatment. Some flukicides only target adult liver fluke and a repeat dose may also be needed. Check which parasite life stage the flukicide used is effective against (early immature/juvenile, late immature/juvenile or adult only) and then time the treatment accordingly or repeat if necessary. Liver fluke will remain a risk for any sheep or cattle that are outwintered and may need repeated treatments late into the winter season.



**Flukicides are grouped into three types:**

- Adult-only flukicides (e.g., albendazole, clorsulon, or oxcyclozanide) – If only one treatment is planned, this should be given 10-12 weeks after housing. If the fluke burden is expected to be high, it is preferable to treat earlier and follow up with a second treatment to prevent production losses.
- Late juvenile to adult flukicides (e.g., closantel, nitroxinil, or rafoxanide) – Single treatments should be delayed until 6-8 weeks after housing.
- All-stage flukicides (e.g., triclabendazole) – Effective against all stages, including early-juvenile fluke. These can be administered two weeks after housing. Resistance to this flukicide has been reported in Ireland, follow up with your veterinary practitioner if this is suspected on your farm.

Each farm has different liver fluke risks, so consult your veterinary practitioner to create a tailored treatment plan based on farm history. Liver fluke reports from the Beef HealthCheck programme are available online for beef and dairy animals sent to slaughter at participating factories through the ICBF website.

**Rumen (Stomach) Fluke**

Rumen fluke infection rarely causes clinical disease, and adult rumen flukes are generally well tolerated. If rumen fluke eggs appear in a faecal sample but the animals are healthy, treatment is usually unnecessary. Disease is typically caused by immature rumen flukes with infections picked up in late autumn resulting in scour or lack of thrive. Similar to liver fluke, avoid grazing young animals on wet or poached land in autumn. As there is only one product available in Ireland for treatment for rumen fluke and its use is considered ‘off-label’, always discuss whether treatment is necessary with your veterinary practitioner.

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