



ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND

Beef HealthCheck NEWSLETTER



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NATIONAL BEEF HEALTH PROGRAMME

Animal Health Ireland, 2-5 The Archways, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, N41 WN27



Beef HealthCheck
AnimalHealthIreland.ie

BEEF HEALTHCHECK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Dr Natascha Meunier, Beef HealthCheck Programme Manager



The housing period is a good time to review parasite control practices to ensure optimum performance while animals are in the shed. Vaccinations should be up to date and boosters given where needed to ensure young stock are protected from pneumonia during housing. Lungworm (hoose) can also contribute to pneumonia and treatment for these worms may be needed leading up to housing. On some farms, this time of year is also a risk for rumen fluke (stomach fluke); these animals fail to thrive and may develop scour. Speak to your vet about the disease risks on your farm and what steps can be taken to prevent them.

In 2024, the programme saw the first increase in liver fluke in a number of years, fortunately this increase hasn't continued into 2025. The risk of liver fluke is still farm specific and depends on the history of fluke on farm, management practices and the number of wet, muddy areas in fields. Abattoir reports can indicate whether liver fluke is present on the farm and if treatments have been effective in the last housing period. Farmers and their veterinary practitioners can access and review their Beef HealthCheck slaughter data directly through beefhealthcheck.icbf.com which will have a record of health data for all animal slaughtered at participating meat factories since the start of the programme in 2016. These online reports were recently updated to give more information and benchmarking your herd against the county and nationally. You do not need to be a HerdPlus member to access this health information but do need a login for ICBF.

For 2025 to date, health information has been collected from 569,400 cattle. Of these 42% were steers, 31% were heifers, 6% young bulls, and the remainder were cows and bulls. Liver fluke damage has been seen in 7% of these animals and live liver fluke parasites in 1.3% of animals, which is a decrease on last year. Pneumonia was seen in 1.8% of cattle and liver abscesses in 3.4%. In steers, liver abscess levels were 3.5% and this was lower in heifers at 2.7%. Autumn usually sees a slight increase in the number of animals presenting with liver abscesses at slaughter. These are often related to animals on high concentrate feeding and if a large number of animals in the herd are presenting with this at slaughter, this should be investigated to prevent performance losses on finishing cattle.

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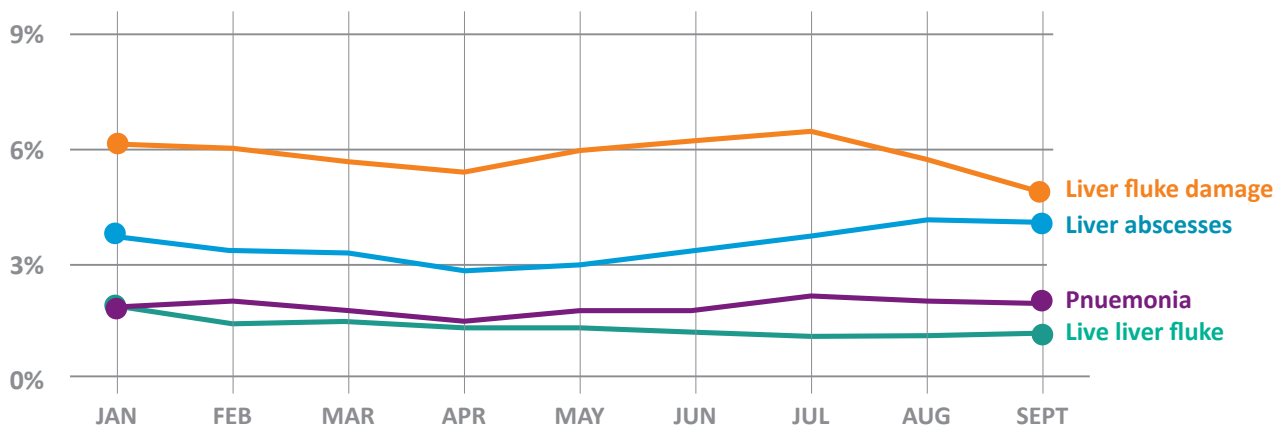
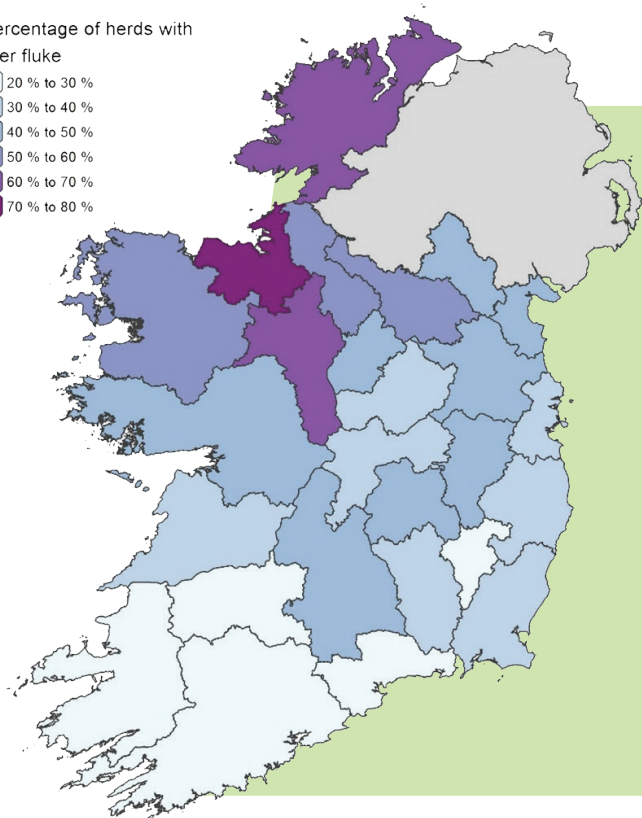


Figure 2. Percentage of animals captured as part of the Beef HealthCheck programme with slaughter lesions.

Percentage of herds with liver fluke

- 20 % to 30 %
- 30 % to 40 %
- 40 % to 50 %
- 50 % to 60 %
- 60 % to 70 %
- 70 % to 80 %



In 2025 so far, 18,900 herds have been recorded as part of the Beef HealthCheck programme. This year, 34% of these herds had at least one animal showing signs of liver fluke damage when sent to slaughter. Active infection in one or more animals was seen with 12% of herds, compared to 17% last year. Nationally, the north-west counties have the highest numbers of herds affected by liver fluke, where between 60% and 80% of herds had signs of liver fluke at slaughter (Figure 2). On the other hand, there are 25% of herds that have not shown any evidence of liver fluke in animals that were presented for slaughter in the last four years. It is possible that these farms are currently free of liver fluke and may not need flukicide treatment but this should be discussed with your veterinary practitioner.

Figure 2: Percentage of herds with at least one animal showing signs of liver fluke at slaughter this year to date.

PREVENTING PNEUMONIA AT HOUSING

Dr Natascha Meunier, Beef HealthCheck Programme Manager



Detecting and treating pneumonia early is essential to having good outcomes. During any high-risk periods, watch young stock closely for signs such as being off-form, dull, lack of appetite and gut fill. As the disease progresses, they might get a fever, watery discharge from the nose and eyes and an increased breathing rate, eventually leading to pus-like nasal discharge and difficulty in breathing. With these later signs, the disease is already very advanced and animals may never recover fully. Calves that develop pneumonia are more likely to be stunted for life, slower to gain weight. Prevention then makes sense to avoid the illness, vet bills and later losses in performance.

Vaccinations can be a key tool to prevent pneumonia at weaning and housing, but there are several other factors at play as to whether an animal develops pneumonia or not. If using vaccines, the timing of vaccination is important – the course of vaccines should be completed at least a few weeks ahead of the high-risk period. Most respiratory vaccines require two vaccinations as part of the initial course.



PREVENTING PNEUMONIA AT HOUSING

WHAT PUTS CALVES AT RISK TO DEVELOP PNEUMONIA?

Any event that adds stress to calves:

- Mixing of different groups
- Weaning
- Changing diet
- Painful procedures such as disbudding, castration
- Transport
- Cold weather or sudden changes in weather
- Wind chill, drafts in the house

Any source of exposure to bacteria, viruses and parasites:

- Buying in animals, especially from multiple source farms
- Mixing young and older stock (young stock can be exposed from apparently healthy carrier animals)
- Dirty sheds, equipment or boots, which may have contained or been in contact with sick animals
- For lungworm (hoose), animals grazing a pasture where there was a recent outbreak

A lack of fresh air at housing:

- Stagnant air can allow for a buildup of ammonia and dust which is irritant to the lungs, making animals more susceptible to disease
- Good ventilation removes contaminants and pathogens

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PREVENTING PNEUMONIA AT HOUSING

HOW DO YOU REDUCE THE RISK OF A PNEUMONIA OUTBREAK ON YOUR FARM?

Consider which periods or procedures are stressful for animals and try to minimise this where possible. For example, use pain relief for any painful procedures such as castration or disbudding. Attempt gradual weaning approaches such as plastic node tags/rings or gradual separation. Avoid multiple stressful events at the same time e.g. mix animals into groups ahead of housing and change the diet gradually. Try not to wean, house, mix and change diet all at once.

Remove sick animals from the group as soon as possible to prevent the disease spreading. Ideally this sick pen should be in a different shed, so that airborne diseases don't get passed between groups. Isolate any bought in animals for at least 3-5 days to ensure they aren't showing any sign of illness before mixing them with your home herd.

In the shed, good ventilation can't be overstated which allows for fresh air but with minimal drafts. Upon entering the shed, a strong smell of ammonia and many cobwebs in the rafters are indicators that the ventilation needs to be reviewed. Increasing outlet widths, changing inlets for more airflow, and positive pressure ventilation systems (fan tubes) are options to explore to improve the air circulation. Dry, warm bed areas are vital for autumn-born calves to prevent chills.

Vaccinations against respiratory disease can be a very helpful measure. Speak to your veterinary practitioner when planning for vaccinations to decide what is best for your farm, as there are many products on the market that target different viruses and bacteria.

HOW DO VACCINATIONS WORK?

Vaccination allows for animals to build immunity to diseases. This means that if they are exposed, they are less likely to show signs of disease. But vaccines are only one part of the prevention puzzle – good hygiene, airflow and management are still needed alongside vaccination to ensure success.

One key aspect of respiratory vaccines is the timing. They need to be given well ahead of the risky periods, such as housing, transport or weaning, and need to be repeated at regular intervals – usually 6 months. Some vaccines only give a good immunity for 3 months. Most vaccines also require a booster to be given a number of weeks after the initial dose. An animal is not fully vaccinated until they have received this booster.

Vaccines should not be given when an animal is sick or another stressful event is taking place, such as weaning or disbudding. They require a strong immune system to work effectively, and a stressed animal will be compromised and not mount an effective immune response to the vaccine, making them less effective.

LICE AT HOUSING

Eilish Gill, SPARC Project Officer, Animal Health Ireland.



While lice does not cause fatalities, it can cause a serious strain on your pocket due to the impact of performance.

The irritation causes cattle to scratch constantly which can open wounds and cause behaviour problems leading to slow weight gain or loss of weight. Hair loss and frequent scratching are the two main signs of lice infestation. Lice infestations can spread rapidly at housing time due to the close contact of animals. Thick long winter coats of animals allow an ideal warm, humid environment for the lice thrive.

There are two kinds of lice:

- **Biting/chewing lice:** Feeds on outer layers of skin and hair.
- **Sucking lice:** Pierces the skin and feeds on blood and fluids.

So what can be done to treat against them?

There are two types of products effective against lice, pour-on synthetic pyrethroids and injectable/pour-on macrocyclic lactones (clear wormer group). Both injectables and pour-ons are effective against mites and sucking lice, however, only pour-ons are more effective against biting/chewing lice.

Examples of active ingredients for these two types of products:

- **Synthetic pyrethroids** - permethrin, cypermethrin, deltamethrin, flumethrin
- **Macrocyclic lactones** - ivermectin, doramectin, moxidectin, eprinomectin

Correctly administering the product is key to good lice control. Lice spread so easily that reinfection can happen without correct management. Before starting, make sure that you know the withdrawal period of the medicine, especially for finishing animals. Always read the label on how to use the product correctly, as there are differences between brands. Make sure the dose is correct for the weight of the animal in front of you; underdosing will mean the product is less effective and can lead to resistance over the long term. If you have new animals joining a group, ensure that they have been treated beforehand. Treat all animals in a group or shed at the same time. Check cattle two to three weeks after treatment to see if there is any reinfection. You might need to re-treat if lice have hatched from eggs in that timeframe, as all products are ineffective at killing the eggs.

Speak to your vet if it seems that a product has been ineffective, as there could be a number of reasons for this. For example, signs of mite infections can look very similar to lice but may need a different treatment protocol. There are also reports of resistance to some treatments.

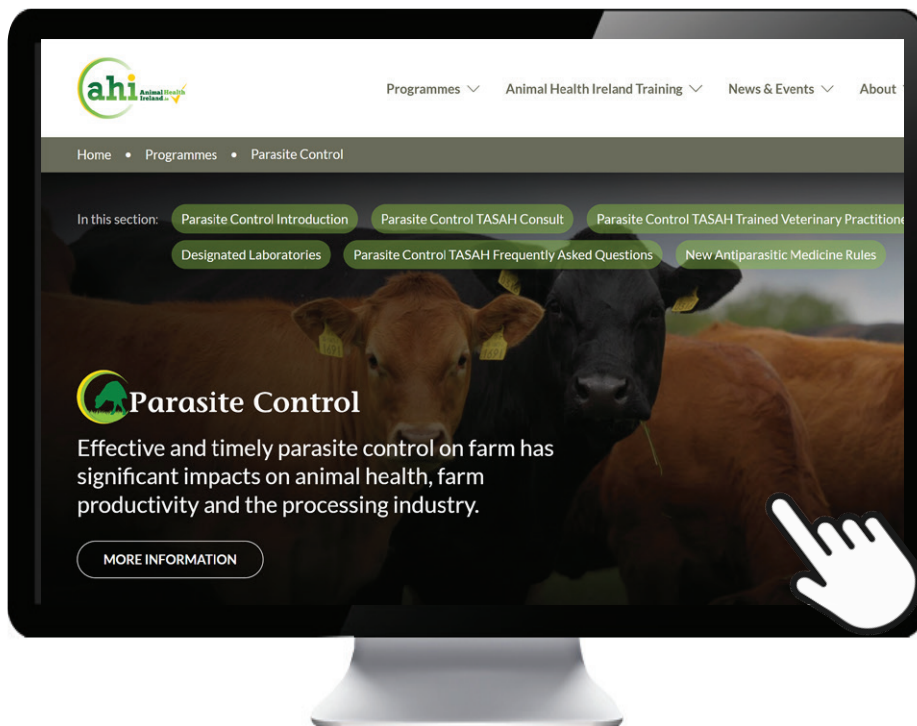
LICE AT HOUSING

Spot-on vs Pour-on

Check if you are using a spot-on or pour-on product, remember that they can look similar but are designed to be used differently. Spot-ons require a large concentration of the drug in one or more spots, usually between the shoulders, from where it spreads to get adequate coverage over the animal.

Pour-ons are designed to be poured along the top of the spine and try to spread the product evenly along the whole back. The product usually needs to reach the skin to work, so make sure the animal is clean. If the animals are not being kept in housing, be aware that rain can wash some of the product off, making it less effective.

Always wear gloves when handling these products for your own safety, and make sure you dispose of the empty bottles or leftover product correctly. These products are particularly harmful to aquatic life even in very low concentrations and should never be disposed of in a way that can contaminate water.



<https://animalhealthireland.ie/programmes/parasite-control/>



www.animalhealthireland.ie

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

