

Significant number of recent BVD outbreaks

The animal level incidence of BVD has stagnated. Up to the end of June 2021, the 12-month animal incidence rate was 0.31%, a level similar to that of one year ago. It is evident that the BVD virus is being transmitted within and between herds. Some concerning BVD outbreaks have occurred recently, with a quarter of all newly diagnosed cases in NI in June being in the Enniskillen DVO area.

Most herds in NI purchase cattle. The BVD status of these herds may be put at risk unless thorough checks are carried out before purchase. The occurrence of new BVD outbreaks may be linked at times to the addition of new stock to the herd.

Herd owners with BVD Positive cattle should be aware of the risks that their livestock could present to other farms, either across boundaries or through animal movements. Even though cattle being sold must have a BVD Negative status, they could still transfer the virus if they become transiently infected or are pregnant and carrying a BVD Persistently Infected calf, or via the spread of virus contaminated vehicles, equipment, or clothing.

As a consequence, in BVD breakdown situations, farmers should not move or sell cattle until at least three weeks have elapsed from when the last BVD Positive bovine animal was culled. Cows or heifers that were up to four months pregnant at the time when the Positive animal was present should not be sold on unless appropriate isolation measures are put in place and additional BVD antibody tests are carried out by the farm's private vet.

To reduce the risks involved when cattle are purchased, sourcing stock from fewer herds will help. Sellers should be asked about the BVD test result history of their herds over the previous year, as herds that have had BVD Positives in this time frame are more likely to have circulating virus. Even if stock to be purchased are described as having been vaccinated, their individual BVD status should be checked, as a vaccinated BVD Positive animal will continue to excrete virus.

Herds with high numbers of untested cattle (including imported cattle) are also a higher risk, due to a lack of awareness of the BVD status of every animal in the herd or the assumption that all cattle are disease-free. The introduction of the BVDU slaughter ban is starting to have a beneficial effect on the Programme, as the total number of BVDU cattle aged 5 weeks or more in NI has fallen from over 20,000 at the start of August to fewer than 16,000 at the start of September.

Note for editors:

1. AHWNI is responsible for the delivery of the Northern Ireland Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Scheme. For more information on the operation of the Scheme, please contact AHWNI (email info@animalhealthni.com, tel. 028 7963 9333) or visit the AHWNI website www.animalhealthni.com.

2. A series of Biosecurity Information leaflets are available for information on the AHWNI website:

- Bio-exclusion: Keeping Infectious Diseases out of your herd
- Understanding Infectious Disease
- Preventing Disease Spread within your farm
- Purchasing Stock: Reduce Disease Risks