



Risk of BVD virus spreading from BVD Positive herds

During the last 12 months, approximately 900 cattle herds in NI have had at least one calf that has tested positively for the BVD virus. In cases where BVD Positive cattle are not culled promptly, the virus is likely to continue to circulate in the herd, therefore any animals sold from that herd (particularly pregnant stock) may present a risk to the purchaser's herd.

AHWNi advises potential purchasers to enquire where possible whether BVD Positive cattle have been present in the seller's herd within the last year, so that the purchaser can make an informed decision about whether to buy or not. Herds that have contained one or more BVD Positives in the previous year present a high risk, particularly where these Positive animals have been in the herd after the breeding date of any cattle being sold. Cattle moving out of the herd could be Transiently Infected with BVD, could be physically carrying BVD contaminated material, or could be 'Trojan' animals, carrying a BVD Persistently Infected calf.

At present, only individual animal BVD statuses are available through APHIS (not herd level statuses). For those cattle born since the start of the compulsory scheme, those that are directly Negative (BVDN on APHIS) or indirectly Negative (INDNEG) for BVD may be allowed to pass through a market or move from one farm to another. In a small number of cases, the animals being sold will be from a farm that either has had the BVD virus present recently or from a farm that has cattle of unknown BVD status present (which could potentially be infected). While the knowledge that individual animals have had a Negative result to a BVD test is reassuring, it is advisable in cases where the seller is known to establish whether or not the herd has been free from BVD.

At the start of June 2021, over 15,000 NI herds met the criteria for BVD Low-Risk herd status, namely:

1. All cattle in the herd and associated herds over 5 weeks of age have a BVD Negative status (applied directly or indirectly)
2. No BVD Positive animals have been identified in the herd in the preceding 12 months.

The number of herds meeting the Low-Risk criteria is increasing with time, as disease incidence decreases and as farmers complete their stock's BVD status profile. BVD statuses may be viewed on APHIS-on-Line herd lists, and it is advised that all animals with a BVDU (BVD Unknown) status or that do not have any BVD status are tested, either by using a supplementary ear tissue tag or by getting a veterinary practitioner to take a blood sample.

If the purchase of pregnant animals is unavoidable, it is best to purchase animals from herds where the risk of pregnant animals contacting the BVD virus has been minimised. Laboratory tests to identify Trojan cattle definitively are not available, however if a direct farm-to-farm move is considered necessary, pre-purchase blood tests for antibodies to the BVD virus may be carried out (an animal that is negative for both virus and antibodies is unlikely to be a Trojan). Opportunities for contact of pregnant stock with cattle of unknown status during purchase and transport should be minimised. Pregnant stock should then be quarantined on arrival and isolated until they have calved and the calves have been tested with negative results.

In order to maintain the Low-Risk status of a herd, it is vital that biosecurity practices are taken seriously. Herd owners are encouraged to discuss with their veterinary surgeon any potential changes that might affect their herd's biosecurity and issues such as whether or not to vaccinate against BVD. Vaccination will not prevent the BVD virus entering a farm, however it can reduce the impact of accidental introduction.

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.](#)