

## Summer Mastitis

As the name suggests summer mastitis is most prevalent over summer, however, there are some clear differences between your common mastitis cases and summer mastitis. Summer mastitis differs in the fact that non-lactating cows (dry cows) and heifers are most commonly affected with some cases been documented in bulls and steers too. The infection is caused by a variety of bacteria and is believed to be transmitted by the head fly. These flies live in bushes and trees and so cases tend to be linked with certain fields with favourable conditions for these flies.

Early signs of infection include a swollen teat on the affected quarter, often with many flies clustered around. The infection progresses quickly and within a week more generalised signs of illness develop - isolation from the group, reluctance to walk, swollen fetlock and hock joints and rapid loss of body condition. The swollen quarter will be hard, hot and painful with thick foul-smelling pus being excreted.

Treatment consists of antibiotics, anti-inflammatory and stripping out the infected quarter as often as possible. Special consideration should be given to in-calf cows as the calf will likely need to be fed colostrum when born due to the reluctance of cows to let the calf suckle the painful udder.

As mentioned previously, flies play a vital part in the spread of the disease,

and prevention measures are based on fly control and antibiotic cover. Careful pasture management is often overlooked but grazing low-risk fields (i.e. not close to woodlands) during warm humid weather could be enough to reduce cases drastically, although we do recommend the use of fly control products such as pour-on. For dry cows antibiotic cover can significantly help to reduce disease, however, the antibiotics may not be active for a sufficient time - we recommend speaking to one of our vets for more details. It is also important to remember that the summer mastitis is infectious and so can be passed from cow to cow, housing the affected cow allows you to give her some TLC and will reduce fly worry.



Environmental mastitis in cows out at pasture can also be a challenge over summer. Traditionally environmental infections were thought to be linked with housing, however, time at pasture appears to be a considerable risk period for mastitis and increased somatic cell counts.

Where grazing is not adequately rotated, bacteria can build up in the environment, especially in areas where cows tend to gather and lie during the night, this is especially important in wetter summers and when cows are grazing into late autumn. The current recommendations are to avoid having cows on the same pasture for more than 2 continuous weeks and to avoid returning cows to the same pasture for at least 4 weeks, this is clearly dependant on grazing conditions and grass growth, and we appreciate it may not be appropriate for every farm.

Actively managing gateways and walkways can also help reduce the cell count over summer. Using bark or shavings can minimise the amount of mud, resulting in cleaner udders and a less bacteria friendly environment. If cows are buffer-fed, it should be done before milking, so that they are more likely to graze directly after milking, giving the teat sphincter time to close before they lie down.

If you have noticed an increase in your somatic cell counts over this summer or are seeing an increase in clinical mastitis cases we would be very happy to design and discuss a mastitis control plan with you. Contact us at the office on 01978 311 444 and ask to speak to one of our vets.



## Preparing for Topping

Abortion in sheep can have a serious financial consequence, but there are preventative measures that we can implement to keep the losses as low as possible. On UK farms the most common causes of abortion are Enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis, luckily there are very effective vaccines available against both. Both vaccines must be given at least 4 weeks before the start of breeding season and so for many of our clients this will be within the coming months.

It is also worth mentioning that it will be time for those pre-topping checks, not forgetting about the rams! Up to 30% of rams are sub-fertile, meaning they get fewer ewes in lamb and take longer to do so; a fit and healthy ram can serve 80-100 ewes in 3 weeks. It may seem early to be mentioning breeding season, but sperm production is a 6 week process and so any problems arising within the 6 weeks prior to mating will have a negative effect on the rams fertility.





Ewe body condition scoring (BCS) should be done at least 10 weeks before mating in order to give us enough time to correct any lying outside the target of 2.5 - 3.5 depending on breed and farming system. It is well documented that a low BCS and poor nutrition have a negative impact on ovulation rates, resulting in decreased scanning percentage and in turn lower profits. The table below shows the effect that body condition can have on lambing percentage in various breeds, however, bear in mind that an overly conditioned ewe is more likely to suffer from metabolic disease before lambing and difficulties during lambing.

As you can see, planning ahead can have a drastic effect on profitability, this is also true when it comes to reviewing your flock health plan. Pre-tupping is the ideal time of year to get this done, it allows us to look back at the previous lambing and identify any areas that might need addressing before the next lambing season.



Body Condition Score							
	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4
Welsh Mountain	60	65	105	116	123		
Swaledale		78	133	140	156		
Mule			149	166	178	194	192
Scottish Halfbred			148	170	183	217	202

## Medicine course

As previously mentioned, we are aiming to organise our next mastering medicine course towards the end of summer/early autumn. It is required for farm assurance schemes to have at least one trained member of staff on the farm. To express interest please contact the office, more details will follow as soon as possible.

