

# August 2025 Newsletter

[www.penbodevets.co.uk/farm](http://www.penbodevets.co.uk/farm)



**Penbode Farm Vets**  
Since 1840



# Bluetongue Update

The first cases of the new vector (midge) season were identified on 12<sup>th</sup> July, and as of 31<sup>st</sup> July the total number of cases is 7. They were found in Buckinghamshire, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire, Norfolk, Cumbria and Wiltshire, so a huge spread across England. All have been cases of BTV-3 which is the strain we have a vaccine against. Total cases in the 2024 season reached 262. This year the total number of cases and the area affected is likely to be far greater.

## How to spot it

### The signs in sheep are severe and include:

- ulcers or sores in the mouth and nose
- discharge from the eyes or nose and drooling from mouth
- swelling of the lips, tongue, head and neck and the coronary band (where the skin of the leg meets the horn of the foot)

### Signs in cattle include:

- lethargy
- crusty erosions around the nostrils and muzzle
- redness of the mouth, eyes, nose
- reddening of the skin above the hoof
- nasal discharge
- reddening and erosions on the teats
- fever
- milk drop
- not eating
- abortion, foetal deformities and stillbirths

### Signs in calves. If the mother is infected whilst pregnant, the calf may become infected with the following signs:

- calves born small, weak, deformed or blind
- death of calves within a few days of birth
- stillbirths

Bluetongue virus also affects **goats, deer, llamas and alpacas.**

As Bluetongue is a notifiable disease, if it is suspected, with sick animals displayed the signs above, it must be reported to APHA. Feel free to pick the phone and discuss any suspicion of disease with us.

## Prevention

Vaccinating your animals is the only way to prevent this disease. As the vector season is likely to last until November it is still well worth vaccinating now if you haven't already done so, but the sooner the better.

Whilst the vaccine is very new, it has proven to be safe, with no effects on fertility in cattle and sheep. It is safe to be used during pregnancy with no more risk of abortion than any other vaccine given during pregnancy. Bulls and rams can, and should be vaccinated, but ideally outside of their breeding period.

**Speak to your Penbode Farm Vet about protecting your livestock today!**



# POISONOUS PLANTS TO LIVESTOCK

**By Clodagh Tanner**  
**MVB MRCVS**

Although we don't come across that many cases of poisonings, they can be very serious or even fatal and at times difficult to diagnose. Knowing how to correctly identify poisonous plants will help prevent potential problems and perhaps an animal's death. Many poisonous plants are bitter and unpalatable while they are growing and will not be eaten by livestock under normal circumstances. However, hungry animals are more likely to eat what they shouldn't or if the plant is dying back or has been chopped and mixed into forage, it may be more palatable.

Clues which may point to a toxicity or poisoning include:

- A recent change in location or forage source.
- Lots of animals getting sick at the same time rather than disease spreading gradually.
- Clinical signs that are not typical of an infectious, parasitic or metabolic disease.
- Evidence of access to poisonous materials e.g. large numbers of acorns on the ground or plant clippings dumped over a fence.

Some common poisonous plants include:

## Ragwort





Most people are now aware of the risks of ragwort ingestion and careful management of pastures means issues are now rare in the UK. Poisoning occurs more commonly when an animal eats forages containing ragwort for several weeks or months. Horses are more susceptible to ragwort than cattle. Sheep are much less susceptible than cattle.

**Symptoms:** Chronic weight loss, diarrhoea, jaundice, and accumulation of fluid under the jaw and brisket caused by liver disease. Affected cattle are often dull and depressed.

**Diagnosis:** Ruling out other more common conditions that cause liver damage such as fluke. Liver changes on post mortem.

**Treatment:** There is no effective treatment once clinical signs appear. Remove contaminated feed and destroy.

## Bracken



Bracken poisoning often occurs when alternative forage is in short supply and animals have little else to eat, additionally some animals develop a taste for the young shoots in the spring. Reduce exposure of animals to bracken by fencing, topping, burning or applying an herbicide treatment; if this is not possible then provide plenty of alternative feed so animals are not tempted to snack on bracken.

**Symptoms:** The signs of bracken poisoning will vary depending on the amount eaten, over what duration and the species of animal affected. Acute disease can occur due to bone marrow suppression. This may present as high temperatures or pneumonia due to secondary bacterial infection, or bleeding due to lack of clotting factors or sudden death. Where animals are exposed to lower doses of bracken over a longer period of time bladder tumours can occur, signs of which include blood in the urine, straining to urinate and weight loss.

**Diagnosis:** A diagnosis is usually made by clinical signs and grazing history. Bladder tumours in cattle can be diagnosed by rectal palpation and ultrasound scanning.

**Treatment:** Any form of treatment for bladder tumours is likely to be unsuccessful and these animals should be culled or destroyed before their welfare becomes compromised.



## Oak/Acorns



Oak poisoning is of course most common in Autumn, particularly after stormy weather when leaves and acorns fall and are eaten by animals sheltering under the tree. Oak leaves and acorns contain tannins. In small quantities the rumen microbes detoxify the breakdown products of the tannins and they don't cause a problem, but when the rumen microbes are overwhelmed, the breakdown products of the tannins, mainly gallic acid, cause damage to the cells of the kidneys.

**Symptoms:** Usually presents as abdominal pain, depression and bloating due to rumen stasis. Constipation also occurs, which progresses to dark tarry diarrhoea, often with blood. Animals deteriorate and become weaker before dying due to kidney failure after 4-7 days.

**Diagnosis:** Based on history of exposure and clinical signs or acorns/leaves found in the rumen on post mortem.

**Treatment:** Again, there is no specific treatment. Supportive care such as fluids can be provided to help support the kidneys.

## Yew





Yew are common ornamental trees especially found in churchyards. Accidental poisoning can occur due to plant clippings being tipped into a field or animals breaking into gardens etc.

**Symptoms:** Sudden death, yew is a severe cardiac depressant so it stops the heart

**Diagnosis:** History of exposure to yew with remains of leaves/twigs in the rumen or even in the animals mouth as death is so quick.

**Treatment:** No treatment, prevent access by maintaining fences.

## Rhododendron



The rhododendron has become both a common garden plant and a persistent invasive species. They contain grayanotoxins which slows the heart and lowers blood pressure. Pastures bordering woodland should be inspected for rhododendron and fenced accordingly. Pieris species and Azaleas also contain the same toxins.

**Symptoms:** Initial signs are severe drooling, regurgitation (vomiting which can be severe and projectile especially in goats) and abdominal pain. Neurological signs follow with them becoming weak and wobbly with dilated pupils and muscle tremors, along with difficulty breathing, a slow heart rate and arrhythmias. In the final stages there is more muscle weakness, paralysis, entering a coma and fitting. Aspiration pneumonia secondary to regurgitation of rumen contents is a risk for surviving animals.

**Diagnosis:** Poisoning is confirmed by clinical signs in living animals or examining the rumen contents post-mortem.

**Treatment:** If you suspect rhododendron poisoning call your vet! Treatment is supportive and there is no antidote. This includes anti-inflammatories and iv or oral fluids, orally activated charcoal may be given if ingestion was recent or cooled tea to provide tannins that may help bind the rhododendron toxin. Antibiotics may be required to prevent pneumonia if there has been regurgitation.



## Hemlock/Water Dropwort



Hemlock grows in damp, muddy places, meadows, open woods, river, stream and canal margins, roadsides and disturbed ground throughout much of Britain. Hemlock is often mistaken for other plants such as wild carrot, cow parsley or wild celery. Animals are particularly at risk after ditches have been cleared out exposing the most poisonous part of the plant, the roots (often referred to as "dead man's fingers"). It is toxic to humans too so if seen do not handle with bare hands.

**Symptoms:** The first signs after water dropwort ingestion are drooling and dilated pupils followed rapidly by difficulty breathing, collapse and seizures. The majority of affected animals die, in the small percentage that survive, diarrhoea is a common clinical sign in the recovery phase which takes several days.

**Diagnosis:** based upon evidence of plants having been grazed or roots exposed and confirmed by post mortem examination finding plant remains in the rumen.

**Treatment:** There is no specific treatment; supportive treatment for symptoms may be given. If poisoning is suspected remove all animals from areas where the plant grows.

## Key take home messages:

- Avoid overgrazing pastures.
- Avoid turning hungry animals into new pastures.
- Learn to identify poisonous plants.
- Fence off areas in pastures where poisonous plants occur.
- Rotate pastures to prevent overgrazing.
- Supply adequate supplies of clean, fresh water for livestock.
- Contact your vet if you suspect any poisoning.





# Tupping – Ram MOTs

**By Matilda Herridge-Nowell  
BVetMed MRCVS**

With lambing season now behind us it is time to start thinking ahead to next years lamb crop. In this article we will be focusing mainly on the rams. At Penbode we offer a ram MOT service; making sure your rams are fit and ready to go for tupping. But why bother? Because an MOT could help you to avoid potentially lots of empty ewes.

It is recommended to perform a ram MOT around 10 weeks prior to tupping. This allows you time to make any changes if necessary (e.g. increasing body condition score, recovering from mild lameness). When performing an MOT examination we look at lots of different things to assess the general health of the ram. But there are a few key points we focus on.

## **The main points of the ram MOT:**

### **Feet**

Tupping is a very active time for rams so it is vital they are sound on their feet. Any lameness will impair their ability to mount the ewes and result in decreased conception rates. We assess their mobility and investigate thoroughly any signs of lameness by checking over each foot.

### **Teeth**

Rams can lose 15% of their body weight over the tupping period so it is important that they maintain a healthy intake. Lost or abnormal teeth can impair their ability to eat resulting in weight loss which has a negative effect on their fertility.



## Genitals

Arguably the most important part of the exam is checking the testicles and penis. We check that the testicles are firm, of equal size, freely mobile within the scrotum and of good size. We also check if possible that the penis is normal without any growths or deviations so that he is able to serve the ewes.

## Body condition score

As mentioned above tupping season is a high energy demanding time for the rams so it is important that they start the season at the correct body condition score so that they don't become too under-conditioned by the end.

An MOT can also include a semen analysis where we obtain a sample via electroejaculation. Without it you can still root out a lot of problems that may affect a ram's fertility; such as abnormal testicles or lameness. But with a semen analysis you can confirm the sperm are normal and moving as they should. Because of this we usually recommend that this is a part of all MOTs. Discuss the details of this further with your vet by calling in to your local branch.

Obviously, the ram is only half of the story when it comes to assessing fertility and optimising your final lambing percentage. The ewes have their own considerations; one of which is infectious disease control – particularly Enzootic Abortion and Toxoplasmosis.

## Barren Ewe Check

It is a good idea to screen your barren ewes, any that have aborted or any that had particularly weak lambs, for Toxoplasmosis or Enzootic Abortion (EAE). Results from these tests aren't always immediately helpful, but are extremely informative in planning for next year regarding culling choices and vaccination. In 2024 it was shown that 80% of flocks had been exposed to toxoplasmosis and 26% to EAE. This screen is in the form of a blood test; best performed on around 10 ewes. You can save yourself a visit fee if you can bring the animals to us which we can quite easily sample in the trailer.

Give us a call and speak to a vet to discuss **ram fertility or barren ewe checks** further.

# Penbode Flock Health Club

## Annual Membership Benefits

**10x Mob  
faecal egg  
counts**

**15% off  
farm  
medicine  
prices**

**Two x 6  
monthly flock  
prescription  
checks**

**Dedicated  
sheep vet**

**Red  
Tractor  
compliant**

**Annual  
performance  
and health  
review**

**Annual  
antibiotic  
report**

**Club talks  
and events**

**Seasonal sheep  
specific  
newsletter**

**Discount  
on specific  
services**



**For just £20**  
Ex Vat p/m



## Our FHC is an excellent value for money package of veterinary services to meet the need of our sheep farms

Clients who pay by Direct Debit, a prerequisite of the scheme receive **15% off farm medicine prices.\*** In addition, you will also benefit from the following:

**10x mob faecal egg counts:** In-house testing for routine gut worms on group samples to monitor parasite burdens, determine targeted and effective use of wormers and check efficacy of wormers

**2x six monthly flock prescription checks:** Gives you an opportunity to discuss any issues you may be experiencing with your flock and allows us to continue to prescribe prescription only medicines for your flock

**Dedicated sheep vet for routine work:** To ensure you get the best continuity of care for your flock, we will try to send out the same vet for all your routine work (excludes emergencies, lambing's, caesars and sick animals)

### **Annual Red Tractor compliant flock health plan:**

Your named vet will review your bio -security and health procedures in line with Red Tractor compliance and will make recommendations on improvements

**Annual performance and health review:** We will review your flocks fertility and health performance data and advise on how and where to improve productivity

**Annual antibiotic report:** You will receive a personalised report with analysis from your vet

**Discounts on specific services:** such as vasectomies, ram testing, annual disease check (5 samples for key infectious diseases), pre-lambing metabolic profiling, and abortion investigation blood sampling

### **Seasonal sheep specific newsletter**

**Exclusive club talks:** Look out for your personal invitations!

(\*when you've signed up to direct debit, exclusions apply)



# Our Upcoming Courses

## Mastering Meds Course

11th August 2025

Starts 10 am at the Penbode kiosk, Holsworthy Market  
£30pp ex VAT

## Three Day DEFRA Approved DIY AI Course

30th Sept, 1st Oct & 3rd Oct 2025

Cost is £495 +VAT

Contact your branch to book your space or  
email [jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk](mailto:jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk)