





SAVETHEDATE 20th June 2026



Raising funds for





We are giving you plenty of notice, because we want as many of you to join us as possible!

More details to follow....

But for now, mark the date on your calendars for the Penbode Farm Vets Charity Ball, raising money for the The Farming Community Network



Calf pneumonia investigations

By Oliver Charlton
BVSc MRCVS



Through winter is when we tend to see most pneumonia in calves. Partly due to weather conditions, but also due to housing and stocking density, meaning spread is more likely. When investigating pneumonia we will want to look at different aspects from housing and sourcing through to testing. Calf housing should have good air movement above calf level, without breeze at the level of the calves. This is needed because calves aren't big enough to create 'the stack effect' which is the mechanism by which adult cattle drive air change in the shed, so they need either natural ventilation or forced ventilation (fans).

It goes without saying that the calf bedding should be dry, and preferably the whole shed should be dry and well drained to keep humidity down, so bacteria and viruses can't survive as well.

Sharing airspace with older cattle is a big risk for young calves, so completely separate housing is ideal. Not the same shed, and preferably not even a lean-to on the side of a cattle shed.

In the event of an outbreak we will look for obvious issues in the housing environment, and then look to identify the infectious cause of the outbreak, with a view to vaccinating future calves. This works well for closed herds, or herds buying in from a couple of other farms, but is less relevant if buying calves from multiple farms, or through market, as they will likely bring different pathogens than the ones we have diagnosed.

There are a few pathogens that can cause Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) – viruses (RSV, PI-3, IBR, BVD) and bacteria (Mycloplasma, Pasturella, Mannheimia, Histophilus). In BRD it is often a virus that causes the initial infection; although the bacteria can cause infection alone, they often need some damage first, or for the calf to be immunocompromised for them to take hold. Many of these bacteria can live in the airways of healthy calves without causing disease, which can make diagnosis difficult.

One method for identification, is to wait a couple of weeks after a group have been affected and blood sample for antibodies to show what the calf's immune system has been exposed to. This can give a good picture, but obviously takes more time before we get an answer. Another method is to take nasopharangeal (NP) swabs from calves with clinical signs of disease, although as mentioned above, we may get positive results for bacteria without that being the cause, so it needs careful interpretation.

The best method to get a diagnosis in these cases is post mortem sampling, which will identify which pathogens are present in the lungs. This obviously requires either dead calves, or a severely ill calf which may need to be euthanased on welfare grounds allowing samples to then be taken.

After some sampling and testing we can identify a vaccination protocol that will hopefully protect future calves entering the system.





As Vet Techs, our roles within the practice are diverse, but a common task is administering calf pneumonia vaccines. Penbode offers a complementary vaccination service to clients who meet certain criteria. This service provides techs to vaccinate calves with no visit fees or time. Please discuss with your vet if you are interested.

We also serve all clients by arranging both the first and second vaccine doses, helping ensure they aren't missed or forgotten, which maximises the vaccines' effectiveness.

Any visits can be weekly or every three weeks, depending on the vaccines used, to keep all vaccinations current during the busy calving season.

Bespoke vaccine plans created by your vet, delivered by your Vet Tech.

For all vaccine visits, we compile a spreadsheet with details including tag numbers, batch numbers and administration dates. To save you a job.

To book a vaccination with a vet tech or to join one of our clubs, please contact your local branch or visit our website by scanning the QR code below.





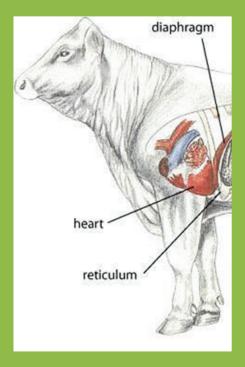
While not as widespread as other conditions, heart problems do occur in cattle. Being able to spot the clinical signs can help make a big difference as the key to most of these conditions will lie in their prevention over treatment.

Traumatic Reticulopericarditis (Hardware Disease / Wire)

Hardware Disease is caused when an animal swallows a sharp object (e.g. a nail, piece of wire, or hard plastic) that then pierces the reticulum wall and in time can puncture the sac around the heart (pericardium) leading to a septic pericarditis. Symptoms usually occur only after the wire has come into contact with the lining of the abdominal cavity, and as a result adhesions will begin to form and restrict reticular movement.

Symptoms include: sudden drop in milk yield; reluctance to move or lie down; standing with an arched back and widened stance; grunting when walking or defecating; swelling under brisket due to fluid build up. The vet may also be able to hear a heart murmur and elicit a pain response when pinching behind the cows withers. If painful the cow will be reluctant to dip her back or be in pain when doing so.

A course of antibiotics is unlikely to be effective without surgical removal of the penetrating foreign body. Magnets are commonly used as a preventive tool to collect any loose metal objects that fall into the reticulum. Unfortunately, a magnet will not remove an object already embedded into the reticular wall. It is important to keep all cattle environments, especially feed areas, free of metal objects. Outbreaks of disease have been reported after tyres used on silage clamps disintegrate and incorporated wire falls into the feed.





https://www.magnet-sdm.com/cow-magnet/



Large piece of wire in the wall of the reticulum on post mortem.

https://www.nadis.org.uk/disease-a-z/cattle/traumatic-reticulitis-wire/



Cow with vagal indigestion and reticulopericarditis – distended abdomen, arched back, distended jugular veins and fluid under the jaw at the brisket.

https://www.farmersjournal.ie/news/news/treating-hardware-disease-in-cows-167031



Ruminal Cow Magnet

Endocarditis (Infection of the Heart Valves)

Endocarditis usually occurs when bacteria from another infection site (e.g. metritis, mastitis, foot abscess) travels through the animal's blood stream and settles on the heart valves. Symptoms include loss of condition; poor milk yield; slow and stiff gait with elbows abducted (pointed outwards); poor appetite; intermittent fever; heart murmur (diagnosed by a vet); and in some cases sudden death. Infection proves difficult to diagnose in many cases ante-mortem. Prevention includes good hygiene and prompt treatment of infections elsewhere in the body.

Congenital Heart Defects

Occasionally calves will be born with heart defects, such as a ventricular septal defect (VSD) in which there is a hole between the lower chambers of the heart. The animal is born with it and does not acquire it later. Symptoms of a condition like this will include poor growth rates, weakness, difficulty breathing, and abnormal heart sounds (murmurs) heard by the vets. As this is a physical abnormality, there is no cure and the prognosis is poor. These calves often don't thrive and may need to be culled early if welfare is compromised.

Cardiomyopathy

While uncommon to see, disease of the heart muscle can occur and has been linked to nutritional deficiencies, like low selenium or Vitamin E. It has also been seen in well grown 2-3yr old holstein cattle from the progeny of certain bulls, indicating a genetic component. Symptoms include sudden death in youngstock; weakness; difficulty breathing; marked swelling, fluid accumulation, and jugular distention. Diagnosis is made on post mortem showing an enlarged heart with a rounded shape and no changes on histology. In order to prevent this, ensure proper mineral supplementation if required on your farm and make informed choices when breeding.

When to Call Your Vet?

Call us if you notice any:
-Rapid or irregular heart rates
-Swelling under the brisket
-Unexplained drop in milk yield
-Any sudden deaths without a clear cause

We are happy to answer all of your questions!

https://www.nadis.org.uk/disease-a-z/cattle/traumatic-reticulitis-wire/ https://www.farmersjournal.ie/news/news/treating-hardware-disease-in-cows-167031

Parasite and liver fluke farm walk



In September, we held a parasite and liver fluke farm walk. Aimed at our Beef and Sheep farmers.

An informative walk led by Paul Uglow from Norbrook, with some good discussions and questions along the way.

Thank you to all who came out and braved the wind.

A big thank you to Rob and Liz Priest for kindly hosting the farm walk.

The attendees discussed types of pasture more likely to home fluke, and the importance of knowing your status, especially for closed herd. A new 'Rapid liver fluke test' was discussed which can detect recent exposure to liver fluke. These tests can be done on farm, using a small drop of blood from the animal's nose or ear. This test is designed to monitor the exposure of a group rather than individuals so several animals should be tested. The results are available in just 10minutes and we recommend speaking to your vets when trying to interpret the results.

Stay informed about our latest courses and talks! Visit our website and Facebook page regularly for updates and upcoming events.

Scan the QR Code for our Facebook



Scan the QR Code for our website





Thursday 30th October
Week St Mary Village Hall,
EX22 6UY
starting at 7pm



You are invited to join us for a social evening which will include dinner and a short talk from our Holsworthy Farm Vet Victoria on her recent journey to Africa. In September Victoria spent a week in Africa, undertaking conservation work with Rhino's.

Free to attend for Penbode Clients, please call your local branch or email jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk to book your space.

Penbode course and events



Mastering Meds Course

with Matilda Herridge-Nowell

Monday 20th Oct 2025 Starting at 2pm

Red Tractor approved

At the Penbode Market Hut, Kivells Market, Holsworthy

Calf Health Meeting

Thursday 23rd October 11am - 2pm

Swingdon Farm, Ashwater, EX21 5DG by kind permission of The Hale Farming Partnership

Free to attend for Champion and Supreme Dairy Club members.

Ploughmans Lunch sponsored by Zoetis



Contact your branch to book your space or email jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk

